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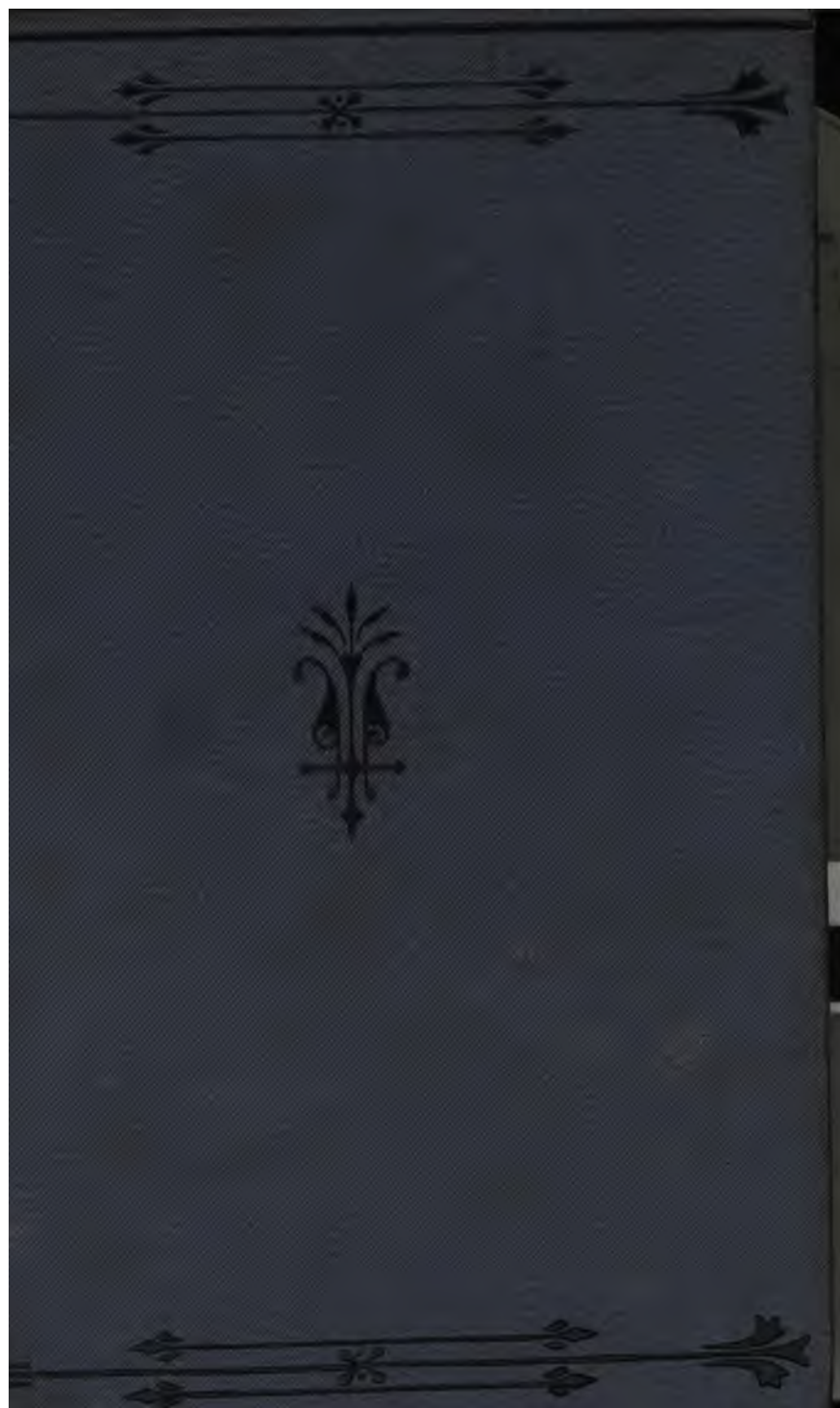
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**AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN**



# AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'JOHN-A-DREAMS'

"With all good grace to grace a gentleman"

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I.





## AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN.



### CHAPTER I.

"Now, by the salt wave of the Mediterranean, a sweet touch, a quick venew of wit! snip, snap, quick and home :—"

"EVEN THERE," said the Contessa Belrotoli, "there are human hearts." She was speaking of Paris, whence she had but just returned with spring to her Venetian palace. "That is so true," murmured her hostess Lady Lappin with her soft contemplative air. These two ladies were firm friends, and it was owing to the devotion of his wife to the Italian lady that Sir Rupert Lappin had become tenant of the first floor of the capacious Palazzo Belrotoli. Lady Lappin had declared again and again that she could not live out of Venice, and so far was her husband from desiring

her death, that he had hastened to secure a permanent residence in that wonderful city. He found it very dull, but he was wont to proclaim its historical interest with amazing persistence and amiability. "There's nothing like it, you know," he would say; "and when one thinks of all that has happened, you know." Beyond this he did not often venture, but would cough a little and smile, and feel encouraged by the vague grandeur of his ideas. As a practical man he was sure that, if he must live in Venice, it was well to be tenant of the finest rooms in the famous Palazzo Belrotoli, and he was glad to enjoy the friendship of the family. It is true that he paid a price which, whispered out of doors, set markets bridges and gondola-stations gesticulating with amazement; but then the Signor Conte, who had sometimes found it hard to pay both his own and his wife's debts, had written him a letter adorned with the longest and softest superlatives. This representative of an ancient Venetian family never came to Venice, and had it been in his power, would have sold to the rich Englishman his palace with all his titles of nobility thrown in—nay, the entire city and the kingdom of united Italy to boot. But though he went so far as to offer the whole mansion for

a royal sum, the Countess his wife, who protested that she adored her Venetians and who was not indifferent to the pleasure of thwarting her husband, commanded Sir Rupert to decline. Thus it happened that the Contessa Belrotoli returned to Venice with the spring, and on a pleasant afternoon swept down from the second to the first floor of her palace, guest of her sympathetic English friend, and eager to enjoy one of those delightful tea-parties which seemed to celebrate the union of English comfort with Italian art.

Seated in Lady Lappin's most sumptuous chair and with her little feet thrust forward and displayed upon a gold-embroidered cushion the Belrotoli was in high good-humour. There were people about her, people who might wonder and admire,—that faithful Florentine the Captain Tiri-bomba erect in his very tight uniform; Mr Bonamy Playdell who was sure to tell stories about her; the venerable Andrew Fernlyn who appeared so refreshingly guileless; Stephen Aylward who was certainly young; and the great Mr Hugo Deane himself. There were also some women present, but these were less interesting to the Contessa. And yet she delighted in the society of Lady Lappin. She never appeared

more elegant nor less common than when she was sharply contrasted with her English friend, who was neither tall nor slender and whose nose was deficient in expression. Moreover she found it pleasant to quench her thirst at an inexhaustible fountain of sympathy. And Lady Lappin on her side was charmed by the Belrotoli, not, as she told herself and others, by her rank, but by something unconventional daring Bohemian in this dazzling Venetian. She received her words with profound attention; and when she heard that remark about human hearts in Paris, she found a world of meaning in it, and said, "That is so true," with a marked emphasis on the "so."

Meanwhile Sir Rupert was hovering moth-like about his brilliant guest. "We have been quite desolate," he said; "quite desolate all the winter, I assure you," and he added a little cough and a little bow as he handed her a cup of fragrant tea.

"I am come back to the home of gallantry," replied the lady with her fascinating accent, her quick glance, and slight wriggle of the shoulders.

"You have been very gay in Paris," continued Sir Rupert, nervous but jocular. "We have heard of you. We have seen it in the papers—the 'Figaro' and that, you know—driving in the Bois

and breaking hearts." Here he paused, laughed, coughed, and drew his hand aimlessly across his lips, while his kindly brown eyes looked doubtfully and apologetically into hers.

"Ah, wicked one!" said she smiling, and sighed deeply. "And they say I have been gay. Gay!" she sighed again. "May I have a little more sugar? A thousand thanks. I have the sweet tooth, as you say," and she gave a little laugh full of coquetry.

"And the best cook, they say," continued the Baronet wagging his head, "and the best turn-out, and the best—the best people."

"One must have the best," murmured the Contessa, as if it were a moral truism. "Ah, but it is good to be once more at this quiet life! To be rid of it *all*!" she added, with a motion of washing her hands, as she thought of a young Parisian who had followed her about during the winter, and of whom she was heartily tired. Here Lady Lappin gave her husband the look which always meant that he was likely to be tedious, and the little man dropped away from the spot where he had been standing and smiling before the Contessa's chair. He was very grateful for these hints and thought it a wonderful thing to have a wife who under-

stood these delicate matters. He retired into the background and admired her social talents. He watched her as she moved among them with an air of high-bred familiarity suitable to a lady who had renounced society for art. It is true that she had never been in that society which is called the best, but having long thought of herself as of one who had renounced the pomps and pleasures of the British aristocracy, she had learned to believe in her renunciation and to speak of it with amazing frankness. Now she lived for art. She wore her hair down her back and bound by a simple ribbon; her gown of violet velvet had a girdle of graven gold. Whatever the fashion of the moment, the classical was always right. The Countess, who got all her gowns from the most exclusive of Parisian artists, protested that she envied her friend. "But how is it possible?" she cried. "Look at me. I am a scarecrow. To dare to be simple one must have curves." Lady Lappin had curves. As she moved among her few intimate friends, who had come to tea with her that afternoon, it was felt that she needed height and a face less cherubically round. So thought Miss Lindley looking at her hostess with somewhat watery eyes, and remembering her own grace in those days when she was called the

Lily of Loamshire. The Lily who had refused a park, was a spinster lily still and not unacquainted with toil. She produced triumphs of intricate embroidery and designs for artistic needlework, painted fans and flower-pieces, and sold these various products privately to friends. She meekly valued herself on this determined privacy; perhaps it was a judicious delicacy which prevented her from exposing her wares in the rude marts of the world. Her delicate nose was apt to get red now; her cheeks were pinched; her motive for living in Venice was economical; and she had a general air of being insufficiently nourished, which made the spectator grateful for the profusion of Lady Lappin's home-made muffins. She was as devoted to Lady Lappin, as was Lady Lappin to the Belrotoli. "It's my belief," Sir Rupert had sometimes said in moments of unusual assertion; "it's my belief that she'd starve if it wasn't for my good wife."

The little afternoon party went gaily on with light talk and the clink of teaspoons. The afternoon sun—the delightful temperate sun of the Venetian spring—came pleasantly in at the long windows and deepened the shadows under gorgeous cabinets chairs and stuffs which filled the large room. Rich objects in confusion was Lady



Lappin's idea of the surroundings fit for those who had given up society for art. The Belrotoli lay back in her deep easy-chair, a slim dark figure against crimson, moving her fan sharply and acknowledging with her eyebrows the most astonishing details of the story, which Mr Bonamy Playdell had brought with him from Rome. It was the same story which had driven poor Mr Playdell from the eternal city. It had been told in strict confidence to so many people that, after embroiling two noble families Italian and English, being scented at the Vatican and exploding at the Quirinal, it had finally raised such a clamour, that the judicious Bonamy had withdrawn suddenly from the Piazza di Spagna. His joy at finding in exile a woman who was worthy of this delightful scandal was unbounded. The veteran gossip almost whinnied with delight as he drew his chair up close to the aristocratic ear. All was going pleasantly and well, as the hostess felt, although the Captain Tiribomba erect as a sentinel by the chair of the Contessa a little marred the artistic ease. Moreover there was one small group of people who would not mingle with the other guests. Hugo Deane refused to yield to the soothing influence of the place and of the hour; and neither his wife

nor his daughter dared yield before him. Now when Lady Lappin was aware that Mr Deane thought himself neglected, she came softly sailing to soothe his wounded feelings. She had a great veneration for Mr Deane, partly because his cousin was a lord; partly because, as she often declared with emphasis, there was no subject about which he did not know something; partly because there was so active a spring of admiration in her capacious bosom that she was always on the look-out for people to admire. Consequently she was pained when she saw on Mr Deane's face that look of languid indifference which seemed to say that it was too much trouble to be disdainful. When he wore this expression it was hard to converse with him, and harder still to extract remarks from his wife or daughter. Mr Deane acknowledged Lady Lappin's attentions with the slightest bows and said almost nothing. Mrs Deane who sat a little withdrawn in his shadow said nothing at all, nervously conscious that if she made a remark her husband would consider it silly. Cynthia never said anything. She sat very close to her meek stepmother, looking out with soft eyes and lips parted with the promise of a smile. Being but seventeen and having seen but little of the

world she regarded the society, in which she now found herself for the first time, with quiet surprise. She sometimes wondered if all people were like these. If so, things were more beautiful than people. It was pleasanter to look at sunsets pictures flowers fountains or churches: yet she liked to look at people too. There was always something or somebody to see; she was pleased to sit still and receive impressions; and she never asked why or to what end. So she saw life at Lady Lappin's little tea-party on the Grand Canal, and was happy. She looked with most wonder at the Contessa Belrotoli whose abrupt transitions from intense repose to jerky movements seemed to compel her attention. She felt a slight fear of Mr Bonamy Playdell who had given her one of his slight elderly nods. She was more afraid of the gleaming glasses and tight uniform of the Captain Tiribomba. Sometimes her eyes wandered to one of the high windows, in which two men were standing somewhat apart from the rest of the party. They were talking with interest but without haste; and in the frequent pauses of their talk they looked out at the light on the water beneath them, and at the various buildings opposite which lay all in shadow. On the face of

the elder man, as he noted some new point of beauty, was a smile almost infantine. As he stood by the window with his broad shoulders somewhat bowed, keen-eyed, with ruddy colour in his cheeks, he made a striking contrast with his young friend's extraordinary delicacy of feature and fastidious lips. Mr Andrew Fernlyn for all his years was an enthusiast.

"He can do well if he will work," he said with that pleasant glow, which he always felt at the prospect of a fresh extension of influence; "but does he really wish to come? He has much to unlearn. He must renounce that fatal popularity. Will he really come to school?"

The young man looked thoughtfully down at the canal. Then with a quaint glance at Mr Fernlyn, as if to deprecate his wrath, he said, "I wish him to come."

"That won't do. If he does not want to come he won't work. If he doesn't work he will disturb others. I can't have disturbance."

"How about me?" asked the other smiling, with a little malice.

"No, no. You we understand. You are the spoiled child of the house. We can't have two."

"But he will wish to work when he can wish

anything. At present he insists on caring for nothing. He boasts himself broken-hearted. Poor old boy!"

"Boasts himself broken-hearted! How do you know he isn't?"

"How do I know?" and he laughed. "I know Philip pretty well. He has always told me everything—the same thing twenty times a-day, or a different thing every hour. When he thought this girl cared for him he suffered agonies of doubt about his own feelings. When she jilted him, as maidens will, he incontinently decided that life was over for him. If you could see the poor boy's letters."

"Heaven forbid! Poor boy! You are a heartless youth, Stephen."

"You can cure him," said Stephen Aylward detecting his advantage in the other's softened tone. "You can make him work. He is sick of his painting as of everything else; most sick of his easy success, flinging the word 'fool' about on his patrons and himself with a fine prodigality. He is just in the mood to begin again from the bottom."

"He is just in the mood to fall into new and deeper folly," said the man of long experience in the vagaries of youth.

"He must be cured for an age, if not for ever."

"There is only one cure for youth," said Andrew Fernlyn with a sigh.

"Have you completed your cure?" asked the other slyly. "Commit one more youthful folly. Come, my master, you must take Philip."

There was music to the ears of Mr Fernlyn in the words "my master." "If I must, I must," he said gruffly, raising his big shoulders as he turned away into the room.

Mr Aylward gave a little laugh as he looked after him, and then sauntered towards the piano, at which the Belrotoli had just seated herself. She received the young Englishman, whose extreme fairness had enchanted her, with a rapid pantomime expressive of sore throat nervousness distracted feelings and the certainty that he would understand her. Then she launched herself into song. Her voice had not preserved its first freshness and vibrated with weakness or emotion. She sang a peasant song of Naples with a fantastic burden. Her singing was not strictly correct; but there was passion, almost fury in the strain. Mr Playdell grew manifestly sentimental. Miss Lindley quivered and sighed. Mr Deane looked at Stephen with the slightest elevation of his delicate eye-

brows. Cynthia, who had an extraordinary ear for music, looked at the performer with round eyes. She was pained; but she supposed that it was fine in its way, that there was expression. There was expression: expression in the shoulders, in the dark lean fingers, in the restless eyes, in the vibrating tones. The singer poured out her heart as she so loved to do. Her discontent with life, her delight in the congenial society about her, her passion for liberty, her memories of the young Parisian who had become a bore—all gave power and pathos to the strain. She was full of fire. Her voice went trembling out into the quiet air, and the gondoliers about the steps below lolled and laughed in the sunshine.

## CHAPTER II.

" Though for myself alone  
 I would not be ambitious in my wish  
 To wish myself much better ; yet for you  
 I would be trebled twenty times myself,  
 A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich."


OUT on the broad lagoon rests the fairest of fair islands, scarce large enough for all the wealth of trees and shrubs and flowers, free from all hedge and barrier, and boasting but two buildings. The one is a long roomy shed, wherein the good Swiss cows find warmth and shelter ; the other is an old weather-beaten dwelling of doubtful aspect, fortress, convent, or fishermen's haunt, still looking askance over the green with an ancient air of mystery, though holding nothing stranger than Hugo Deane and his family. Mr Deane liked the old house partly for its appearance of distinction, partly because it was cheap and he could not bear



to be harassed by daily questions of expense, and partly because he thought it necessary to be close to Venice. He might any day have to consult the archives for the furtherance of his great work. It had been long known to several literary persons that Mr Deane was at work on a history of Venice—a comprehensive history beginning with the first flight of fugitives who settled like sea-birds on the water, and ending with the final departure of the Austrian band from the Piazza di San Marco. Such a history political social and artistic would doubtless occupy a considerable period in the making. Meanwhile Mr Deane worked in a delightful room into which the sun could be admitted at any hour of the day. There he might sit and let his eyes rest on the long leaves of oleander and on brighter bay; on the fair waters beyond ever changing and ever beautiful; and far away on the Campanile of San Giorgio, which rising slender into the diviner air might likewise raise heavenward the author's thoughts. But Hugo Deane was not only a maker of history. He was himself a man with a history, as women were apt to guess; and the facts therein recorded were safe from the attacks of the most learned and truculent critic. He went for them to his own memory,

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and not to dusty parchments. He had lived and loved; and was now writing history. The chief events of his past life may be quickly enumerated. He was the only son of poor but fashionable parents, and second cousin of the late Lord Cheeppyre, who moreover had been always on the best of terms with the Deane family. At school the young Hugo had been in no way remarkable. He appeared to his companions a quiet, gentleman-like fellow: he valued himself a little on his superior refinement. At Oxford he learned to value himself more highly on his judgment and taste. He could not conceal from himself that he was more quickly intelligent than his fellows, more keenly sensitive to elegance. He picked up a great many books of all sorts, perceived the tendency of each, and classified them readily. At this period of his life he wrote a good deal of verse, which never offended against good taste, and which he rarely could be induced to show. He cultivated sentiment up to a certain point; indeed he cultivated all his powers, but no one in excess. An elderly politician whom he met at his father's house only expressed the general belief when he, as it were, pigeon-holed young Deane as a remarkably well-informed young man. So judicious a youth was bound to make a



mark in the world ; the only question was as to the particular nature of the mark. He thought that he should probably be something out of the common ; and when he was abruptly called upon to choose a career, he shrank from so commonplace a proceeding. All the other young men about him were choosing careers. He was sure that there ought to be a difference. He felt a distaste for the trickery of diplomacy and the clumsiness of blue-books. Besides he saw clearly that as a diplomatist he would be hampered by insufficient money. The same vulgar insufficiency would hinder him as a politician ; besides English politics were distressingly insular and far less interesting than Continental. He preferred the scientific examination of the International Society, the Papal Policy, the Neo-Catholic, the Neo-Pagan, the Panslavist, the Panteuton, the Panmelast. He turned coldly too from the noisy struggle of lawyers ; still more coldly from the eager competition of the city. He was aware that his mechanism was too unusually fine for the calculation of profit and loss. Indeed he preserved through life a peculiar dislike of business, and felt himself lowered for some time after looking at his private account. Hence, though


he always shrank from extravagance, his affairs were always a little confused. He was somewhat vexed by his indulgent parents' suggestion of divers occupations which seemed to them fitting, and so took leave of them for a while, and went abroad with the vague expectation of further cultivation. Once in foreign parts, he fully justified his course in his parents' eyes by wooing and winning an English girl young beautiful, and with a fair claim to be considered an heiress. He loved her with as much love as so well-balanced a character could possibly feel. She took him with entire love and trust at his own value; and she was very happy. She was complete mistress of that sweet feminine logic, which says, "I love him: therefore he is right." Clear-sighted enough in her view of others, she saw him through a mist of tender tears greater than he was. She bowed before her Ahasuerus; she believed in his glory, and could wait for his recognition by the world. She had a child-like faith in the history of Venice. On his side, he was never so ardent as in these first days of his married life. His wife inspired him with a feeling which was almost enthusiasm. He would not suffer himself to doubt the successful completion of his great

work. It was time to be done with secret verse-making, fragments of criticism, records of observation. He had read a hundred biographies, and was well aware of the normal course of eminent literary men. These chosen spirits at a certain moment bid a touching farewell to the licence of boyhood, to the fugitive pieces light offspring of gaiety of heart, and concentrate their feelings and their thoughts into one purpose. So Mr Deane, once happily married, set about the process of concentration, and placed before himself with due solemnity an end to which his labours should be directed. He needed blue skies to cheer him, bright sun to warm his blood: he hated dust and noise. What more natural than that he should choose for his life's work the history of Venice? There was plenty of time, for he had concentrated his powers at an earlier age than most eminent men of letters. Life seemed long before him. And life seemed very long and fair to his beautiful young wife; fairer still when her little daughter came to share her happiness. And yet she died young. Her husband's studies led them to the monkish library of an obscure town, and kept them there too far into the summer. The pale delicate



Hugo who very wisely kept close watch upon his health found that the place agreed with him amazingly, and never thought of asking about the strength of the young wife with the flushed brown face. She had always been well and strong; and so she waited for him patiently, certain that the first change would put her right again. And so the change came. The fever came out of the fens at night, and she shivered at the touch. Perhaps, as she lay dying, she saw more clearly the man whom she loved. It is certain that the most vivid among the earliest recollections of Cynthia Deane is the look of her mother, as she held her close and said, "My little daughter, you will be kind and good to the father, whatever happens." She repeated "whatever happens" in a faint, sad voice; and the little girl, looking at her with wondering eyes so like her own, lisped in answer that she would be very good to the padre. Then the beautiful young mother, whom the fever had left so weak, turned away her head to smile for the last time at the historian who was coming into the room. Mr Deane was amazed by the depth of his own grief. Unconsciously he had acquired a habit of leaning on his wife, of living with her life. He was thrown off his balance for a

time. He could not bear the companionship of his little daughter, who looked so like her mother, but who asked support instead of giving it. Indeed he never quite got over the feeling of annoyance that the child was there in her mother's place. For a time he thought that his strength was departed. Then little by little his good sense reasserted itself. He had the best authority for believing that there was no cure like work. He found solace in notes and abstracts, in a dignified demeanour under sorrow. He was an interesting figure at this time. Deep black gave a greater air of distinction to the pale elegant head; he was so sad so studious and so young. It is no wonder that many women felt the pathos of his situation, and petted his little motherless child. But he was sternly true to his work. It was terribly dull without the enthusiasm and belief which had supported him. He feared those moments, which seemed to grow more frequent, those moments in which he distrusted his powers; he needed a trusting presence on which to repose. He declared to himself that the little Cynthia cared more for her doll than her father: and indeed she was intensely devoted to that Italian doll with the bold beady eyes and the contadina's apron. On one of his



visits to England he carried the child to Cheapstowe, where the Dowager Lady Cheeepyre kept house for her little son. Lady Cheeepyre was delighted with the little girl who lisped in Italian; with the contadina doll and the contadina nurse who brought a picturesque element into the commonplace English park.

From that time Cynthia passed a great part of her young life at Cheapstowe—a quiet happy life. One day, when she was staying there with her governess, she heard with amazement that her father was about to marry again. It had never occurred to her that it was possible for him to take another wife: but she accepted the fact quietly enough. Mr Deane had prepared himself to rebuke her for selfish disapproval; when he heard of her calm acquiescence he blamed her for deficiency of feeling. And yet he told himself that he was marrying mainly for his child's sake. Mr Hugo Deane not only wished things to suit his convenience, but also would by no means forego the crowning luxury of self-sacrifice. When he bestowed his hand on the meek Miss Milvain, who attended him with sympathy and burnt her humble incense before his genius, he found the very prize which he wanted, and was not sorry that many ladies were sure that



he was throwing himself away. "It is for our child," he murmured regarding tenderly the miniature of his first wife, and he more than half believed it. So he raised a second and more faded Esther to the royal seat; and betook himself with renewed zest to the history of Venice. Cynthia acquiesced in the marriage; and when in process of time her little brother was born, her acquiescence was warmed into gladness. Mariuccia the doll was deposed in favour of Master Fabian. Mrs Deane was obliged to be chary of her attentions to her pretty delicate-looking boy, because her husband was a little jealous of her devotion, which had become necessary for himself and for his work. She was a proud woman when on rare occasions he pressed her hand, and said, "You help me, *Saramia*." He did not like the name Sarah as pronounced in the English manner. "We must not spoil the boy," he said to her; "we must learn to control our affections for his sake." The little Fabian was happy enough on his enchanted island. Old Rosa the wrinkled toothless but joyous old woman of the house sang to him in her high cracked voice, danced for him though her bones ached, and payed him the most extravagant compliments. His nurse Vittoria, for all her laziness,

would have gone through fire and water for her little prince. He could get anything from his sister. All these women loved him dearly, and though he teased them from morning till night, he was fond of them. But he lavished his greatest affection on the little dog Cecco, who did not care a button about him. Cecco was undeniably supercilious, and spent most of his time in eluding his young master.

"Cecco! Cecco!" cried Master Fabian tumbling out into the happy morning air, which set his bright light hair flying. Cecco, who was just round the corner, pricked an ear and trotted off silently with a very high action of his little silky paws. He was bent on a private inquiry into some vastly important matter.

"Fabian! little prince! little bad one!" cried the nurse Vittoria coming slowly in pursuit. Old Rosa seized the occasion for dropping work, and came nimbly out to help, or at least to talk. She indulged freely in talk and expressive pantomime. Out of an open window came the sound of a piano sweetly and slowly played. "How she makes the music, the little daughter!" exclaimed old Rosa cutting a caper to the sound. Vittoria nodded acquiescence and stopped to listen, straightway

forgetting her pursuit. Cynthia, with her thoughts only half busy with her playing, was recalling old melodies and smiling to herself. The day was lovely and full of tender influences. Up in his spacious study Mr Hugo Deane laid down his pen and allowed some troubled lines to appear on his forehead. He would not complain; but his wife, who was accustomed to read his face, laid aside her knitting and went softly down-stairs. "Cynthia, dear," she said, "your father is very busy. I think he is a little disturbed by the music. Would you mind, dear?" Cynthia nodded gravely, and closed the piano. She strolled out through the window and half closed her eyes as they met the delicious air. Surely it was the loveliest of Venetian springs. Her stepmother looked after her with her expression of distress intensified. "What a pity she does not think more of others!" she muttered shaking her meek head. Then she went back to her lord with a sigh and a keen feeling of self-reproach. Mrs Deane was always ready to blame herself for matters entirely beyond her control. Even if a day did not fulfil its early promise of fine weather, this lady felt guilty and could not meet the eye of her Hugo, who was peculiarly sensitive to atmospheric influences.

"Cynthia never thinks of anybody but herself," said the historian fretfully, as his wife rejoined him. Had her cousin Stephen Aylward been present, he would have said to himself with his ready mocking criticism, that Cynthia never thought at all.

## CHAPTER III.

"Yet I remember when I was in France,  
Young gentlemen would be as sad as night  
Only for wantonness."

STEPHEN AYLWARD came away from Lady Lappin's tea-party with a pleasant sense of success. His unusual warmth and flow of words had not been wasted. He had got his way, as he generally contrived to get it in his dealings with Mr Andrew Fernlyn; and it was settled that Philip Lamond, friend and companion of his boyhood, was to be taught to paint and to be cured of his love-sickness by a single course of treatment. Stephen smiled a little, and called himself a fool for interfering in his friend's common experience. "Most people go through it like the measles," he said to himself. Mr Bonamy Playdell, who gave him a lift homeward in his gondola, had never been through it, though he was sentimental enough, especially after


Lady Lappin's muffins. He lay at his full length, which was not great, and in an attitude which only a tendency to corpulence prevented from being supremely graceful.

"A wonderful woman," said Mr Playdell softly, waving his hand backward at the Palazzo Belrotoli. "I could tell you a story," and his mouth curled with satisfaction. He had never been in love himself, but he warmed himself at other people's love affairs. He paused, and slightly smacked his lips. "Do you know about Tiri-bomba and '59?" and Bonamy launched himself gently on his anecdote.

Stephen, who knew the story, sat rather stiffly on his side of the gondola and regarded his companion with an air of amusement and distress. He was vexed with himself for being so intensely amused with all these people, who were so kind to him. Bonamy moreover gave him peculiar shocks and almost disgusted him with ease. Too much of the little gentleman's society, he sometimes thought, would drive him to African exploration or Abyssinian lion-hunting.

When the boat stopped lightly at his steps, the young man went quickly ashore, avoiding his comrade's fat hand while he thanked him for his kind-

ness. Then, when the little gentleman had been wafted round the corner lazily waving his farewell, Stephen ran up-stairs to his big bare rooms at the top of the house. Big and bare they looked when the sunshine was not in them, but very neat. Stephen could not bear disorder. He was one of those rare men who are light-fingered and who never try to do two things at once. The common man, while his eyes follow his right hand, will with his left grope blindly on a crowded mantel-piece and at the same time send his great foot sprawling to the rear in search of a footstool. But Stephen Aylward was a man who would put down one thing before he touched the other; who disliked all sprawling movements; who held it no waste of time to put things straight; who had even tucked in chintzes with no loss of manliness. The books in his room were in fair order. Everything was in its place, and an extraordinary cleanliness bore witness to the fact that the young Englishman was not ashamed to supplement the labours of the Italian housemaid. Even the tools of the painter, which are in their nature untidy, had an air of neatness. After a careful review of his surroundings, Stephen busied himself in making the sitting-room more cheerful. He made a small fire of wood,



more for the eye than for heat, though the nights were still rather cold. He cleared one of the tables and covered it with a clean but rough cloth, for to-night he had ordered a supper from the *trattoria*. There is a magic in the word supper, informal Bohemian fantastic. Friendship, love, wine, wit, folly; and the cheaper the more distracting. A supper in Venice! He sat still and waited. There was no light save the flicker of the fire. He sat still with his faint smile frequent on his lips, musing and remembering. He recalled the early days of his friendship for Philip Lamond, a thousand memories which came back with phantom pictures of old school-buildings and fair elm-trees, the sparkling of summer waters, and with old sweet perfumes more real than pictures. He smiled again at his first amazement at Philip's impulse and craze for confession. How often he had listened, while the other boy poured out all his hopes fears and thoughts, and assured him eagerly once more that he could not speak like that to any one but him. So Stephen sat looking at the flame, mocking himself a little for the freshness of his feelings; but his heart was very tender though he smiled, as he awaited his friend with the blighted hopes. At last the hopeless one arrived.



Stephen heard the boatman's cry as he turned out of the Grand Canal, a slight grating of the worn marble steps plainly audible in the still evening air, the moving of luggage, a well-known voice, a well-known step; and there was Philip once more before him. They had never sworn eternal friendship, and they did not rush into each other's arms. "Well, old fellow?" said Stephen rather shyly. Philip was but little hindered by insular shyness.

"Well?" he asked in turn, as he wrung his friend's hand with almost painful intensity, and then, "Have you got anything for me to eat?"

This was reassuring. The new-comer looked remarkably well. There was no grey visible in his thick brown hair; there was colour in his sunburnt cheeks; he looked stout and strong; and he was evidently hungry. The fire was stirred to greater brightness; the burnished lamp was lit, a pair of extra candles were brought forth in honour of the guest. Then supper came, and Philip began to eat and drink and to laugh at his friend. "Neat housewife as ever," he said. Then he went back, as he was apt to do at a new meeting, to early days, revived old jokes and young laughter, summoned former friends each with some well-worn characteristic anecdote, asked questions and did not wait for

the answers. Philip had journeyed with all possible speed from England, and seemed to have shaken off his troubles by the way.

"Stephen, do you remember when I first knew you, a little prim-faced fastidious wretch? Why I liked you will always remain a mystery."

"I was somebody to pour confidences into," said Stephen, who disliked to be the subject of conversation. "You were always nearly suffocated by your own plans and feelings."

"I suppose I was like that then."

"Then!" exclaimed Stephen softly, and smiled.

"I suppose I was rather a frantic animal. Do you remember"—and straightway he was launched once more on the flood of his young experiences.

It was an intense pleasure to pour out once more all his thoughts and feelings to his chosen friend—the friend who had always charmed and irritated him by his reserve. He drank the light Italian wine, stirred the old log to sparks with his boot, and talked and laughed, forgetful of his broken heart. Venice and friendship were enough for him that night. Without were crowding memories, innumerable possibilities, and all the beauties of the passing hour; within was the best friend in the world. His feelings were at last too much for mere

speech, and his pleasant barytone came to his relief. As he sang the verse of an old song, he got up, strolled to the window, and opened it. His voice sank to silence before the witchery of the hour. The little balcony was high up in the air; common crowded roofs and peaks and bits of wall and quaint flower-like chimneys were bathed in one wide moonlight—a fairy city amid mysterious shadows, born of air and water. Philip gave a great sigh, and as he sighed remembered his sorrow. He felt the need of love which had been denied him. He pitied himself that he must do without this good thing. There were tears in his eyes as at last he turned from the window; but he smiled as he saw that Stephen had fallen peacefully asleep with his feet outstretched to the wood-fire.

After a few days of close companionship Stephen arrived at the conclusion that his friend was certainly more melancholy than he ought to be. To the world at large Mr Lamond had always seemed incapable of melancholy; but it might be more truly said that he was melancholy every other minute. Light and shade flicker and glimmer and melt together under a beech-tree in summer, but the whole effect is happy. But heretofore Philip had never

been sorrowful. Now he seemed at times a victim of positive depression. Stephen looked at him for the accustomed burst of declamation, and sometimes looked in vain. It was almost alarming to see him sit still for more than ten minutes and do nothing. He stared before him with his hands in his pockets and his under lip thrust out. Of course he made no secret of his feelings. He repeated to Stephen the story of his woes, which he had previously written at length. He launched fierce epigrams against coquetry. When his friend was sarcastic at the lady's expense, he defended her with excessive ardour. Stephen was pleased to be cynical about women. He sometimes briefly asserted that the sexes were naturally antagonistic. "They can't be themselves when men are about," he said. "She played a comedy with you, old man—they all do."

"Nothing of the sort," said Philip hotly. A few moments passed and he himself burst forth in denunciation. "Men are only natural with men, and women with women. Together they must play comedy—or tragedy. Just look at that tedious old comedy, Married Life. The woman goes on contentedly playing it—it's her second nature. Even clever women don't see through it; they are

like children, and are happy making believe; she permits herself for ever the same little tempers and disappointments, out of which she expects to be argued; the same little exaggerations and misrepresentations, which she expects to be called upon to modify. She expects her husband to play this stale comedy daily, and to seem to believe in it. Pahaw! He is sick of it."

"And so," said Stephen, willing to humour him, "we have the common spectacle of charming child-like wife and grumpy husband."

"Pooh!" said Philip, shortly, "don't talk social essays. They are always stuff."

"Well," said the other, calmly, "I am glad that you have escaped."

"Escaped!" cried Philip, jumping up and striding about the room. "Escaped!" he repeated; and was so indignant that he could utter nothing further.

"Anyway it's well over," said Stephen continuing to potter with his colours.

"Over, is it? You think a man goes through this sort of thing, and gets rid of it as he puts off his coat. I know that I shall never be the same man again. For good or ill I'm changed."

He stood before his friend and glared. Stephen

looked up at him curiously, and thought that after all there might be some truth in the emphatic statement.

"I have lost my boyhood for ever," said Philip grimly.

"Not all of it, I hope," said Stephen.

Philip continued to glare at his friend, until he felt himself beginning to laugh. Then he observed conclusively, "My dear Stephen, if there is one thing you are more deeply ignorant of than another, it is women."

"That's all right," said Stephen with his attention devoted to tone. He was more industrious than usual, hoping that his friend would fall into like habits. But Lamond would neither work nor play. He held his chin in the air in the very sanctum of Andrew Fernlyn, who shook his head at him and regarded him with a humorous kindly look. The young man was rather brusque to the old enthusiast; but Andrew only smiled in a pitying manner. "His heart has been over softened," he said to Stephen, who had half apologised for his friend's hard manner. If his heart was unusually soft, Philip protested by a manner now chilling, now defiant. He would not be amused by the society at the Palazzo Belrotoli. The Contessa

declared that this friend of "the adorable pale English youth" was insupportable. "There is something of affectation in his passion and his reserve," she declared; "and the least falseness I cannot bear." Even Sir Rupert Lappin remarked tentatively that he seemed "uppish." The proud youth was almost dumb in the presence of Lady Lappin's statuette of Cupid; but he waxed loud in an attack on Captain Tiribomba for the intrigue of Italian diplomacy. He stared over Mr Playdell's head when the little gentleman was favouring him with the great Roman scandal; tumbled over Miss Lindley's modest foot; upset his tea; and declared on the way home that he was no longer fit for society.

"To think that such people should exist!" he exclaimed.

"They are very nice people," said Stephen, "in their way."

"Nice!"

All Stephen's efforts were useless. Philip Lamond would neither study nor amuse himself. He upset the furniture of his friend's rooms, left everything in the wrong place, laughed sardonically at the other's attempts to paint, and stalked about the little alleys and passages of the town defiant of interest, a determined Gallio.

"I must go to the island to-morrow," said Stephen one evening. "I have had a letter from my father: he wants me to button-hole my uncle Hugo and talk business. You don't know the Deanes?"

"No."

"I daresay they would not interest you."

"I daresay not. I beg your pardon. What are they?"

"My uncle Hugo is a distinguished man of letters. When people wish to flatter me, they say that I am like him. Really I am the nephew of his first wife."

Philip gave a grunt which may have meant that one Stephen was enough, or may have merely expressed a wish for more information.

"Also there is his boy," continued Stephen, "the little Fabian—an imp."

"Is that all?" asked the other indifferently.

"All except the women."

"And they?"

"They are nothing particular. There is a Mrs Deane, my uncle's second wife; and Cynthia——"

"What a ridiculous name!"

"Cynthia is the daughter of the first wife, my father's sister; and consequently Cynthia is my first cousin."



"Is that all you can say for her?"


"About all, I think. She's young, you know; and I suppose rather stupid."

Philip snorted in answer, and kicked the foot-stool.

"I shall go early," said Stephen, "and get back for a lesson from Andrea. Do you care to come?"

"I think not, thanks."

Philip left alone stood up and stretched himself, and as he moved was conscious of his fine health and strength. He pushed his thick hair back from his forehead, and stared out into the clear cool night. It seemed hard to him that life had nothing left for him.




## CHAPTER IV.

"Is the day so young?"

PHILIP LAMOND rose next morning in a mood of gentle melancholy. He supposed that he must live, or at least might as well live; though it was not worth while to begin the day at that preposterous hour, when Stephen came in upon him and told him that he was off to the island. Yet it was still early when he had finished his solitary breakfast and moodily faced the day. He missed his friend sadly. There was nobody whom he could disturb; nobody at whom he could grumble. The rooms were too narrow for him. He dropped down the stairs and into the busy little alley at the back of the house. There were many folk bustling up and down; little lithe women in skimp gowns and with hair elaborately dressed; broad country-bred girls with massive braids and bright shawls across

their shoulders ; many loafers and many cigarettes. They crossed and recrossed in the funny little paved passages, which are the dry streets of Venice, which twist and turn through the length and breadth of the city, rising over little bridges and ducking under arches, creeping round angles of church or garden wall. At this early hour no ray of sunlight reached the pavement of these narrow streets ; but the air was warm, and the populace seemed happy. They were waking to a new life. Winter weather and insufficient polenta may be borne with good - humour, but not with hilarity. Now summer was coming, and warmth, and tourists. There is much gaiety and freedom in this back-street life. People don't think of themselves there, as even Italians must think when they cross the Grand Piazza and the band plays. Business moves nimbly on, and gossip lingers. There is pleasant haggling at the bright little vegetable stall. This simple gaiety is not to be resisted by sympathetic people ; Philip was amused. He could not help feeling an exquisite quality in the air, which met him more frankly as he stepped into the open Place. He glanced up at the great horses of Saint Mark, which paced above him, all of dull gold in the shadow. Down below their



stately feet the pigeons well fed and fearless thronged about the scattered grain, or sweeping headlong by human heads streamed into the sunshine, and into sudden splendour of burnished green.

The morning had a charm beyond words, beyond thought, full of exquisite emotion, with all the freshness of spring and all the softness of summer. The air brought a thought of the open sea, and a dream of roses to come. Somewhere it had lingered among the marble columns of a lone Greek temple, and gathered the sighs of unseen worshippers. It had moved laughing on the laughing waters, and caught the myriad whispers of the sea. It had moaned once more for the dead white limbs of Leander, and kissed the foam at the rosy feet of Galatea. With music and dancing it stepped from wave to wave; and before it Botticelli's Aphrodite quaintly beautiful and delicately pure was wafted shoreward in her magic shell. So spring comes, and Venus, and the three sisters with their arms entwined. There was never an old doge worthy to wed the Adriatic.

Marco the gondolier lolling at the water's edge felt the sweet air and forgot the winter. He lay in the sunlight bright as a lizard. He had girt him-

self with his splendid sash, partly for sympathy with the general gaiety, partly because he knew that the women of the *forestieri* themselves of dismal hue and dowdy expect romantic colour in the gondolier. The Venetians have always been a sensible and business-like people. When Philip Lamond caught sight of this brilliant young boatman grinning recognition, he thought that he might as well go after his friend Stephen, because friendship seemed suitable to the time and because it would be pleasant in a gondola. Beyond the crowded boats and the tremulous water, the Campanile of San Giorgio, with the spring of a willow wand, rose from its island into the cool bright air. It seemed to enjoy the atmosphere about it and to gaze triumphantly away to the far-off misty mountains where snow and snow-white cloud melted together in the blue. Philip, lying in his gondola, floated forth into dreamland. On every side the distance clothed itself in haze, too luminous for shadow, too soft for light. Marco bending lithe and supple to the oar heard the young Englishman sigh; and from his post behind him began to babble a little song to cheer him. But Philip was away in the past, sad as night, finding some subtle pleasure in his sadness. Moments

of tenderness came back to him freed from their intrusive doubts, and scenes wherein all commonplace objects were veiled. The day was eloquent of love; and to him of all men was love denied. Now when he knew that he must live without it, now he felt his full capacity of passion. "Ah me!" he sighed lying with half-closed eyes and the caress of the sweet air upon his cheek; and he smiled bitterly as Marco's little amorous ditty tinkled in his ear. But the elfin charm of the morning would not be ignored. He clung to his melancholy, but she ever eluded his clasp. His blood began to dance to the silly little measure as the ripples danced against his gliding boat. As they drew near the long low terrace of the public garden he opened his eyes wide and sighed again for beauty. The fishing craft were gathered there ready for flight. They had just felt the light breeze, and as the gondola drew near, one by one they turned their broad glowing canvas to the liberal sun. Every sail was rich with pious symbols, richer with gorgeous orange and red, softened and harmonised by time and sea. One by one with motion almost imperceptible they glided from their place like a stately harmony, all chastened splendour, and gave themselves with leisurely abandon-

ment to the pursuing air. Philip pained by a too keen sense of beauty closed his eyes and floated on. Beyond the farthest point of the public garden the expanse of water broadened; and the freer air brought a stronger sense and joy of life to the young Englishman. On they went over the open water, and Marco now and then picked up again the burden of his tripping song. But he was silent as they came near the island, and pushed his boat more briskly forward. The little island was joyous with fresh green of trees and deep rich grass. Philip thought that a fragment of England had floated away and come to nestle under the wing of Venice. He stepped ashore and was ankle-deep in English daisies; he was screened by budding lilac and laburnum. The daisies seemed more thick and vigorous than in the meadows at home; and there were buttercups too, and less obvious violets. Spring might revel here. Across a little open dell among the shrubs came trotting a little dog with a business-like air and a rather large bone in his mouth. He trotted without hurry on little fluffy paws, turned a disdainful little nose at Philip as if contemptuous of tourists, and disappeared. "Cecco! Cecco!" sounded in a child's voice, and with light fair hair just flying and the flush of

chase on his cheek, a little boy came flying down the dell, stood suddenly still on seeing Philip there, and darted away through the bushes. For the rest there was no sound save the babble of birds intent on housekeeping, and the stirring of leaf and grass. "An enchanted island," said the intruder to himself, as he passed noiselessly onward and out to the open lawn. Beneath a group of trees the deep grass was powdered white with cotton. A little further and he came upon a tree scarce taller than himself, but proud of its first blossoms—proud too perhaps of the strange fruit which it bore. Philip had long since abandoned himself to the sweet wonder which was abroad that morning. Only the unlikely must be. He smiled with recognition of the fitness of things when he saw a girl's straw hat hanging by the strings upon that little tree. He did not hesitate; he had given himself freely to the spirit of the day, and the spirit led him onward noiseless on the soft grass, and wondering. Then he stood still. Almost at his feet, where the shade lay lightly on the turf, a young girl was lying. The tall slender figure was curled delicately; one hand had strayed into the sunlight and lay palm upward in the warmth; the smooth dark head lay back, and the deep eyes



from under drooping lids looked straight to heaven ; on the gracious mouth was a smile so slight and soft that it might abide there for ever. To Philip Lamond the beauty of the day was crowned, its mystery revealed. As he looked at her she became slowly conscious of some presence. She turned her head slightly and saw him ; her eyes grew round with child-like question, and the warm colour came softly into her smooth dark cheek.

“ I am Philip Lamond,” said he quickly, as he suddenly remembered that he must explain himself.

“ And I am Cynthia,” said she ; and the smile came back to her lips as she got up and held out her hand to him.

## CHAPTER V.

"Some to discover islands far away."

"WRETCHED boy!" said Andrew Fernlyn grimly, as the door of the great well-lighted chamber opened, and Stephen Aylward coming quietly in looked at the master half-apologetic, half-smiling. "Wretched boy! where have you been these many days?"

There was a wonderful access of vitality and dignity to Mr Fernlyn when he stood among his art-students, square and grave as a Venetian senator.

"Pottering among the back canals," answered the young man smiling; "daubing—hunting effects."

"Hunting effects! *Dilettante!*"

"England has need of *dilettanti*," said Stephen with mock solemnity.

Mr Fernlyn shook his grizzled head, but said

nothing, being not quite sure that his pupil was not quoting his own words to entrap him.

"Forgive me, Messer Andrea," said Stephen using a title which he knew to have a soothing effect, and preparing to draw with his most studious air.

"As usual," muttered the master looking down on him with enforced grimness.

After this there was silence for some time. The three other students, who had scarcely interrupted their work to smile or nod a greeting to Stephen Aylward, were very busy. The eldest of them, a short square-shouldered man with thin pale cheeks strong beard and restless eyes, was at work on one of Andrew Fernlyn's pictures. He had been just promoted to that honour, and valued himself thereon. An American by birth and education he combined to a degree which puzzled his English friends remarkable shrewdness with extraordinary innocence and much simplicity of enthusiasm. The second student, who was at school that day, was a young Italian workman intent on the design for a vase. The third was a mere boy—an English school-boy—who had borne many stripes for covering his books with drawings, and whom stripes had driven to wildness. Him the good

Messer Andrea roaming round England and hungry for pupils had redeemed from the hands of a most scientific coach. His relations had agreed that the boy should be a painter, since he was fit for nothing better. Mr Fernlyn had determined that he should be both a good man and a good painter. "I and my lady Art," he said in one of his expansive moments, "will together soften his manners." The boy on his side almost worshipped the master, and for the most part worked with a kind of fury.

Andrew Fernlyn continued to stand by Stephen, as he drew, with a slight frown upon his shaggy eyebrows and an occasional grunt of disapproval.

"Where's your broken-hearted friend?" he asked suddenly.

He would not have confessed for the best picture in the world how disappointed he was at losing the chance of impressing his theories on a good subject. He never doubted that in extending his influence he was spreading abroad the sound rules of art. He had loved art so well: he knew that she had revealed herself to him. "Art," he once said shortly, "is my wife, and my pupils are my children. I want no others." He was generally gruffest in tone when he felt most. He was very tender in thought to young Lamond as he

asked Aylward grimly of his "broken-hearted friend."

Stephen looked up to answer with his eyebrows raised and a faint flush in his cheek. "I have seen next to nothing of Philip," he said, "for days. He's always over at the island."

"With your cousin?"

"With my uncle. I can't make it out," he continued wheeling round in his seat and glad to confess his surprise. He always talked more freely to Andrew Fernlyn than to other people. "I should have thought that uncle Hugo would have made Philip rave."

"And your cousin?"

"My cousin! What do you mean? Cynthia?"

"His heart is in a very tender state," said the master in his driest manner.

"You don't mean that you think he's falling in love with Cynthia?" Stephen looked Mr Fernlyn straight in the face and mocked him. "Messer Andrea, you don't know much about these things. She's a child to begin with."

"Eighteen. Did you ever look at her eyes? Beautiful eyes."

"Why, Philip"—and Stephen stopped for a low laugh—"Philip is a fellow who likes clever girls,

and brilliant and dashing, with handsome gowns and smart talk, and all that."

"Go on with your work," said the master shortly. Stephen laughed again his pleasant low laugh and picked up his pencil.

The air was pleasant enough in Andrew Fernlyn's painting-room, wide and cool and with well-managed light; but it was far pleasanter on the most lovely island of the lagoon. At full length on the grass with his chin propped by his two hands lay Philip Lamond, and stared at Cynthia Deane. He had not spoken for some minutes, and this silence was unusual. Cynthia looked up from the daisies with inquiry in her eyes. He drew himself nearer, and burst forth impetuously, "I want to tell you everything." She looked at him with more pleasure than curiosity, and he went on quickly: "I am ashamed of myself when I remember that I thought myself in love before. I can hardly believe it—I can't imagine it—but I know I did. It was only the other day that I thought I was miserable because a girl didn't care for me, and now—— Oh, I am so glad—so glad!"

"And you have never cared for any one before?" she said in a low tone full of joy.

"Never!" he cried in all truth and honesty;

"Never! Oh, Cynthia, I wish I could lay my whole heart bare to you! I wish you could see every thought I have ever had of any other woman! I wish you could see with your eyes how utterly I love you!" He made a quick gesture as if he would offer her his heart to read. She made no answer in words; only the unready blush came warm and beautiful under the clear dark skin, and she did not turn away the eyes which were soft and large with tears. Her childlike innocence made her sacred. Philip's passion was subdued to tenderness before her; the deepest feeling was the purest; he longed to keep her safe in his arms; it seemed to him the most pitiful thing in the world that she should ever grow old and know sorrow. The light was soft about them as the young man and maiden strolled together hand and hand. They said little, for silence was more eloquent than speech; but in Philip's heart there was as it were a pent flood of confession. He had an aching need of absolution for all past follies from this sweet saint. She for her part seemed to be floating away into an atmosphere of unimagined joy, where no mean thought or petty care could breathe, a dream-land very precious, where all beautiful things which she had loved were blended and deepened into an

intenser beauty, where it seemed that even the meaning of her dear mysterious music would be made clear. After a time he broke the silence with a sigh and a question. "And you? Have you never loved anybody?" She looked at him round-eyed and laughing.

"I have never seen anybody," she said; she thought a minute and then added, "except my cousins."

"Cousins!" He did not like the word.

"There's my cousin Stephen," she said slowly.

"The best friend in the world," cried Philip; "I don't mind how fond you are of Stephen—at least I do; but no matter. Who else?"

"Who else?" she repeated smiling. "There's nobody else but Freddie."

"Who's Freddie?"

"Lord Cheeppyre."

"You never cared for him?"

She did not seem to hear his question which he had asked for the pleasure of questioning her. It was an exquisite joy to assume the right of examining this simple witness. She was wondering for the first time whether Freddie would be vexed when he heard of Philip Lamond. She hoped not, for she had grown up with the little lord at Cheapstowe, and had always been fond of him, or almost always.



As they came near to the corner of the old house Philip paused. It seemed hard to say good-bye. She came and stood close to him and looked up into his eyes as she asked, "When will you tell my father?"

"Is there any hurry?" he asked, quickly. "I have only known that you lived for a few days. It is so good to know this thing, you and I, and nobody else in the world."

"But we ought to tell my father."

He looked at her half-surprised and half-amused. "To-morrow then," he said; "I will come to-morrow on purpose. Leave this day perfect for memory." He drew her to his side, and the dark little head lay softly against his shoulder.

"I never lived till now," he said in a broken voice. She looked up at him as if he had read her thought.

"I don't think I was ever quite alive before," she said. Passionate vows to be worthy of this girl came thick to the lips of Philip Lamond. He could not speak, but he bent his head above her. Simply as a child she raised her face to his, and he kissed her on the lips. There was great awe in his heart as he kissed her for the first time. She by that sweet sign felt that she consecrated her life to him.

## CHAPTER VI.

"O Jephtha judge of Israel what a treasure hadst thou!"

MR DEANE was in his calmest mood. His wife sat by him quietly expectant, and being unusually free from household cares that morning did not irritate him by her normal look of anxiety. He had just completed an important bundle of notes on one of the doges, and tied it with a silken cord. He felt that something had been done. The temperature suited him exactly. The light subdued to the proper tone fell from the right quarter on to his open book; and the book had been recently published, had just come from London, was both instructive and agreeable. It was a book about books—a book delightful in tone from the treatment of its important subject to the tint of its paper. The mere word tone was pleasant to the ear of Mr Hugo Deane; and he had been

always fond of books about books. He had always expected himself as a man of letters to be well acquainted with the great works of every age; and he was glad to say that his taste was catholic. He rejected nothing which was good of its kind. Nevertheless of these great works of former ages many had weighed upon him by their dulness and bulk; some had offended his fastidious taste by their coarseness. "Of great historical interest," he was wont to say, delicately discriminating the good from the good in its place. Perhaps absolute goodness was in his mind identical with that which pleased a refined few in the nineteenth century. However that may be, he liked better to read about a great work than to read it. With the cultured Mervin, he inhaled the essence of its contents; with the methodical Flint, he weighed it as a link in the dragging chain of literature;—with both gentlemen he tasted the bouquet of the very newest style. Mr Deane shuddered in the hell of Dante; but to linger with Professor Mervin in the Florence of the dark ages, and to mark amid glittering processions gay garments inlaid armour antique viols and bright sunlight one dark-clad form, grim and gaunt, prophet and poet among the idle, a thunder-cloud in summer, was to enjoy a most

piquant contrast. To descend into hell with Professor Mervin was far easier for Mr Deane than to abandon himself to the stern guidance of Virgil. The Professor glided playfully over the most repellent horrors with an allusion to the Time Spirit. In like manner too the age of Fielding, as softened and shaded in the modest study of Mr Flint, was far more agreeable to Mr Deane than the robust painting of the great humourist. Between Hugo Deane and Tom Jones there could be but little sympathy. So books about books were pleasant—and this new book was one of the best of its kind; and the reader leaning gracefully back in his deep leathern chair was conscious that it was his privilege to enjoy the more delicate aromas of life. He was satisfied with the chastened beauty of the view, with the long gentleman-like leg which was carefully disposed over its no less aristocratic fellow, with the neatness of his slipper. He was satisfied with the world, and with himself. At length the silence was broken. There was a quick step in the stone passage, a knock at the door, and Philip Lamond entered. A keener observer than Mr Hugo Deane would have noticed in the young man an unusual appearance of self-repression. He seemed to hold himself in hand like a fidgety

horse; and no one knew better than Mr Lamond the headstrong nature of the animal which he had to control. Mr Deane however saw nothing but a new acquaintance who had made himself very agreeable—a young man of ideas and of a becoming modesty. He did not mind being disturbed that morning; and he greeted his visitor with a smile. Philip was elated by his reception, and brimming over with emotion wrung the welcoming hand a little harder than was necessary. Mr Deane winced and smiled again; but his wife under the same infliction could not restrain a little cry, which she quickly converted into a cough. She need not have suffered such agonies of penitence, nor been so fearful of paining the visitor's feelings; for young Lamond was wholly busy with a more important matter. He was suffering from a rush of words to the lips—an eloquent flood which he could hardly restrain or reduce to order. As he stood erect looking far away through the open window, Mr Deane regarded him with critical appreciation—declared to himself that this was a fine young fellow, and let his fancy wander to the Athenian decks at Salamis. "A clever lad too," he thought, "and one who has notions." Indeed Philip had made himself very

agreeable to the elder man during the short period of their acquaintance. He was generally ready to talk,—and he could talk well, though, as Mr Deane thought, with a tendency to extravagance. He had drawn bold and almost grotesque pictures of the present state of English culture, and made a thousand whimsical observations on the condition of contemporary art. All this was in his usual manner, and was indirectly flattering to his hearer, who would say, “No, no—not so bad as that,” to the other’s wild accounts of the inadequacy of successful men of letters, and would yet laugh while he deprecated. That which was less natural to the young man was the deference with which he had listened to the instruction of the man of letters. There was no subject about which Mr Deane was wholly ignorant; but he had a somewhat aggravating way of imparting information—a manner which under ordinary circumstances would have quickly struck sparks from Philip Lamond. Hugo Deane had during the course of his life irritated a vast number of amiable persons by his manner of using the formula, “The answer to that is.” He knew the answer to almost everything; and it was generally introduced, whatever the question might be, by that chilling form of words. “The answer to that

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is" had been gently applied to Philip on several occasions, and Philip had borne it like a lamb. Now it seemed that Philip would not talk at all; and the silence was beginning to be embarrassing, when he wheeled suddenly round from the window and came close to Mr Deane with a slight frown of concentration and looking straight, almost sternly, into his eyes said with a sort of gasp, "I have come to ask you for your daughter."

Mrs Deane gave a startled jump in her chair and looked breathlessly at her husband. He had never had so disagreeable a surprise. He felt as if cold water had been suddenly poured down his spine, and such a shock was doubly annoying on this morning when he had been so unusually comfortable. This wretched youth too, whose taste for his society had been so complimentary, had been all the time running after a silly girl. Moreover his abrupt declaration was positively indelicate. Mr Deane resented this bother which had come to disturb his peace, was inclined to administer a sharp rap in return, and felt an augmented contempt for his daughter. "No, no," he said snappishly, "it's too absurd; Cynthia's a child—a mere child."

"She's eighteen," said Philip, shortly.

"Yes, yes, you may credit me with the knowledge of my daughter's age," and he smiled bitterly.

Philip knew well that he would not further his cause by losing his temper. He controlled his impatience and said, "I can wait. I can wait, if there are no other reasons."

"But there are other reasons," sharply answered Mr Deane who was annoyed by the young man's persistence, which obliged him to go further into this disagreeable matter. "You might take my answer," he continued; "I assure you that it is impossible."

"At least I may know why." The words leapt out more sharply than Philip intended, and the face of the elder man assumed an expression of pained surprise and conscious superiority. Hugo Deane might be querulous, but he never lost his temper. Lamond felt half ashamed of his outburst, but would not relinquish his rights. "I think I am entitled to know the reason," he said in a milder tone.

Mr Deane sank back in his chair with a sigh, as one about to yield to an inconsiderate demand.

"We have other views for Cynthia," he said wearily with a half glance at his wife, who kept



her eyes fixed on him, and foresaw that this disturbance would make him ill.

"Other views?" questioned Philip.

"Yes, other views. I really don't know why I should confide to you our family arrangements; but perhaps it will be better that you should understand once for all that Cynthia is engaged."

"What!" cried Philip.

Mr Deane waved his hand and drew the breath through his closed teeth with a slight expression of pain. "Or as good as engaged to her cousin, Lord Chee pyre. His mother Lady Chee pyre and I perfectly understand each other; and as soon as my child is of an age to marry anybody she will marry her cousin. And really this whole thing is so abrupt and absurd, that—pray let us hear no more about it."

Lamond stared open-mouthed at this father, who seemed to have no doubt of his right to arrange his child's life. Then he burst out abruptly, "But she knows nothing of this—of any engagement—any arrangement; she loves *me*. She has told me that she loves *me*."

Mr Deane was somewhat disgusted. His taste for maiden modesty was offended. "So this is not the first declaration of your feelings," he said coldly;

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and added turning to his wife, "I conclude Sara that this is new to you. Really I think that it would have shown more delicacy in Cynthia——"

"Don't say that," interrupted Philip with a throb of pain in his voice. "Don't say that: I only spoke yesterday; her first thought was that you must be told; I begged her to say nothing till to-day, to let me speak. I did not look for this."

The elder gentleman bowed stiffly and said, "I should have been sorry to think that a child of mine could be wanting in delicacy." Then after a moment's uneasy pause he began again querulously, "Don't you think we had better end this interview? It is very painful to me. You must see that it is no use."

"But I can't see it," said the persistent young man. "I love her with all my heart; and she loves me. I can hardly believe it; but I know that it is true. You can't mean that you will make her marry another man when she loves me?"

Mr Hugo Deane felt that he was used very ill. It was hard that he should be worried, and have the disagreeable duty of inflicting pain, when no good could come of it, for he had made up his mind. It was extremely irritating that this youth should have no faith in his wisdom, should clamour

for reasons instead of accepting his decision, should insist on playing the martyr. He knew that active healthy lads like this have no real capacity for suffering, whatever they may think. He had cultivated sentiment himself; held that he had made a love-match in his youth; had suffered when he lost his first wife. He knew that he was a man of exquisite sensibilities, and he knew what suffering was. As he looked up at the straight vigorous form before him and the proud carriage of the curly head, he almost laughed at the notion of deep grief in connection with such a man. There was a faint smile on his lips as he said, "No, no! You fancy yourselves in love. I quite understand it. Italy and this wonderful spring weather, a week's idleness, and a little propinquity. Juxtaposition, you know. You have read the '*Amours de Voyage*'? of course you have. Be a man, and you will soon get over it. Come, be a man."

"But why should I get over it? I don't wish to get over it." Philip was making stupendous efforts to be conciliatory, but his fists were tightly clenched in the pockets of his shooting-coat. The exhortation to be a man almost made him swear. Mr Deane saw that kindness and good advice were useless. He took a sharp tone again, and anxious

to have done with the business carried the war quickly into the enemy's country.

"And may I ask how you propose to support a wife?" he asked. The suddenness of this question took Philip Lamond aback. He had not got any very definite answer ready. Indeed he had come to the conference in his most splendidly sanguine mood, ready to fall into open arms and to unfold a thousand brilliant but vague projects for the future. Mr Deane saw his advantage, and pushed it.

"Of course you have a profession?" he asked with well-bred interest.

"I am a painter," said the other shortly.

The man of culture was really fond of the fine arts; yet there was a taint of sarcasm in his repetition of the words "a painter!" and he added in a meditative manner, "not always a very lucrative profession. May I ask if you paint to amuse yourself, or if you sell your pictures?"

"I sell when I can. I have been lucky for me—for a beginner—a mere student. I have sold several little things during the last two years."

"To friends?"

"Yes, to friends," answered Philip, to whom the question came with wholly novel force. Mr Deane's

equanimity was almost restored. He allowed himself to direct a half glance at his wife of kindly amusement, as if he pitied the weakness at which he smiled. So a famous wrestler who held a stripling at his mercy might steal a glance at the admiring circle. The stripling was too intent on his own thoughts to observe the other's looks. He took a few steps quickly, and coming back close to Mr Deane's chair said very seriously, "I want to be wholly frank with you." This statement was met by a nod of courteous acknowledgment, and the young man went on, "I know that I have little to offer. I am a younger son, with an allowance of £400 a-year. But I know I can work if I have somebody to work for; and I think I can succeed. I won't hide anything from you. I don't think so well of my painting as I did. I have learned lately that I have much to unlearn, that I have been over-praised. For the next year, perhaps two, I must give myself rather to study than to making money. I am sure that I am on the right tack now. I know I can't expect you to have faith in me; that I must seem rash and presumptuous in asking for so much when I can give so little. I beg your pardon if I have seemed too confident—seemed to urge claims. I

ask nothing but to wait and hope. You will let me hope? You will give me a little time?" Perhaps it would have been well for Mr Deane if he had got rid of his young antagonist on these terms; but emboldened by Philip's descent to entreaty, he hoped to defeat him once for all, and get from him a final renunciation of his claims. He pushed his victory too far. He shook his head gently.

"My dear boy," he said, "you must see that it is impossible. In these days to marry on £400 a-year is to starve. According to your own showing it must be many years before you make anything to speak of by painting. It would be wicked to speak of hope. *Experto crede*. Look at me." There was a fine air of candour about Hugo Deane as he indicated himself by a gesture of his long white hand. "Look at me! Nobody could live more simply. I live abroad. My family is small. I have no expensive tastes—except books, and those I for the most part consult in public libraries. What do I find? Even plain living and high thinking is expensive in these days. You cannot find a better example than myself. I——"

Mr Deane once fairly started on the peculiarities of his own position and tastes might have

gone on for a long time, had not Philip broken in on the current of his speech with his usual want of diplomacy. He had paid small attention to the experiences laid before him, for he was tormenting himself with the question whether his adviser was treating him with perfect candour. Now the suspicion of insincerity in the people about him was always peculiarly irritating to Philip Lamond; under present circumstances it was intolerable. Any suppression or even arrangement of the truth would increase his own frankness to the verge of brutality. Now he felt that he must speak out, however awkward the subject. So he threw up his chin, and broke in abruptly on the other's good counsel. "I thought—that is, I was told that Cynthia—that Miss Deane had something of her own."

"You thought my child was an heiress!" The words sprang forth venomously, as Mr Deane turned quickly in his chair. He had arrived at the conclusion that the conversation would not take this disagreeable turn. Now on a sudden he was wounded between the joints of his armour, and stabbed quickly in answer, "You thought my child was an heiress!"

"For God's sake don't say that," cried Philip,

hotly. "Last night I went to tell Stephen of my— of my joy; and he said something, I don't know what, of her being entitled to something on her marriage. I am not a fool. It's your child I want, and not money. But I know that we must live before my work deserves to be paid for. I only want to know the truth." There was passionate appeal in the last words. Mr Deane after his momentary flash had sunk back in his chair. He wore the air of a martyr. His wife came softly to his side guarding her gown from contact with this cruel young man. Philip felt his heart sink as he recognised the enmity of this meek woman. Her Hugo laid a limp hand in hers, and turned a reproachful look on the strong youth. He sincerely pitied himself.

"I have no wish to withhold the truth," he said. "Pray believe me so far. It is true that Cynthia will on her wedding-day be legally entitled to the greater part of my small fortune—legally entitled. I shall not dispute her claim." He spoke in a faint voice; and when he paused, his wife looked at young Mr Lamond as if she would meekly challenge him to rival this heroic magnanimity. After a pause full of emotion Mr Deane continued, "Your friend, my nephew Stephen, told the truth; but he might have told you more. He might have



told you that the last wish of my daughter's mother, my first wife, was that her little fortune might be dedicated to the furtherance of my work ; that our child might never deprive me of the slender means by which I am enabled to pursue my labours without looking to immediate gain. Your friend Stephen's father John Aylward is the surviving trustee of his poor sister's, my wife's, marriage settlement. He and I stood together by her death-bed ; he can tell you that what I say is true. No, no—pray don't interrupt me. These details are repugnant to me. I won't deny it. But you are entitled to the truth. The interest of the little fortune is mine until Cynthia marries. Then it is hers legally. It will be for her and her husband to decide whether she will deprive me of it." To one who heard the pronounciation of the word "legally" there could be no more doubt of the heartlessness—nay, of the iniquity of law.

Mr Deane paused ; but as Philip only stood gloomily frowning and said nothing, he went on in a soft sad voice, "I shall not complain. Whatever her decision, I shall not complain. Very likely I have been mistaken from the first. My life's work may be a delusion—may deserve failure. It's very likely—very likely." There was a

sound of real hopelessness in the last words. Philip Lamond looked down with troubled eyes on the pale gentleman, who seemed to have sunk limp and lifeless into the corner of his big chair. There is nothing more embarrassing to a youth with a natural tendency to reverence than to be forced into an attitude of condescension to one whom he feels that he ought to respect. Philip had approached Mr Hugo Deane with respect for his notorious culture and his studious and simple life. Now he could not but feel for him a contemptuous pity, which somewhat soothed his irritation. He stood frowning and silent, until Mr Deane looking softly up at his wife spoke again. "It may be Sara that we must begin the world again." She was affected to tears. "It will be hard to give up the purpose of my life. Perhaps I am not so well fitted as a younger man for everyday journalism and magazine writing. But we must look out for work of that kind. You will be true to me Sara through it all?" She could not speak for tears. "It may be just," he murmured sadly; "it is certainly legal." Then recovering himself from his collapsed condition he turned to Philip and said, "I must beg you to say nothing to my child about Lord Cheepyre. It is his mother's wish that noth-

ing should be said at present. I am bound to respect that wish. May I ask you to respect it too?"

"I have no wish to speak of him," answered Lamond shortly.

Then Mr Deane waved his hand dismissing him, and said as he sank back again in his chair, "My fate is in my child's hands; go and ask her what she will do." Philip bowed to Mrs Deane, who would not look at him, and went out.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Happy in this, she is not yet so old  
But she may learn."

"Do you understand?"

She understood enough. Hints and dark sayings which heretofore had passed her by unheeded came back to her now with their full meaning. For the first time in her life she had grown very pale. But when Philip had finished speaking, the colour came flowing back to her cheeks and lips. "It can't be right," she said; "it can't be right." Philip took her left hand in his right, as if to strengthen her, but he could not trust himself to speak. Presently she spoke again in a low tremulous tone. "Do old people care so much what happens?" she asked. And then again, "We are so young," she said, "so young," and shivered. Philip Lamond standing still before her and listening to her words was

torn by warring emotions. At last moved by the passionate necessity to be loyal he said—

“Your father told me it would spoil his life.”

“And our life?” she said with her eyes on his face.

“I can’t speak now,” he answered; “I don’t know what to think; I dare not trust myself. I must go away and try to think. You will meet me to-morrow—here, in the evening, at five?”

“Yes,” she said, “and you will tell me what to do.”

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead with an aching dread in his heart. Then he turned away. The sunlight seemed glaring and barren; the dust was crumbling under his feet; the scent of lilac was sickening. As he lay in his gondola, Marco’s flippant ditty beat in his brain. He dropped his hand into the cool water, but its freshness was gone.

Having landed he plunged into the narrow back streets, feeling only that he could not rest, and that he must get through the hours, until Stephen Aylward should come from his drawing. So he strode about among the little winding ways, while his thoughts went in one familiar circle, and he was weary of them and would have crushed them

if he could. At last a new thought intruded, and he was faintly surprised to find that he was tired and hungry. He had eaten nothing since breakfast. He turned towards the Great Piazza and passed across the narrowing space of light and the sharply-marked line of the advancing shadow. He took his accustomed seat in the restaurant, ordered some food and a bottle of wine, and sat moodily waiting. He ate and drank and his strength came back to him; but with strength came restlessness and anger against his fate. The wine was like fire in his blood as he went out and hurried home. He found the lamp lit and a small wood-fire burning for cheerfulness' sake.

Stephen was long ago tired of the amazement with which he had heard the tale of Philip's passion, and had sunk to the more familiar level of gentle irony and expectation of the ridiculous. On that day he had worked harder than usual, but had paused now and then with his pencil in the air and a quaint half-smile on his lips, as if he heard afar off the flood of confession to which he was certainly doomed. He seemed to hear again the voice of the boy Philip as it cried in the first glow of their friendship, "You are such a jolly fellow to tell everything to." Since that day

he had been told everything, had listened to a thousand schemes, sympathised with every variety of mood between ecstasy and despair, and had occasionally given a few words of advice. He thought that this new whim of his friend surpassed all the rest, and asked himself again and again if it were possible that he had gone seriously wooing. As for his cousin who had barely passed the awkward age—a girl with large wondering eyes and a habit of silence—he pictured her staring open-mouthed at her impetuous lover, and laughed softly at the picture. So when he went home in the evening, he made the room pleasant for chat and himself ready for confidences. He looked up as the door opened, and knew in a moment that he would have a new experience of his friend. Philip Lamond flung himself into a chair without a word. He had been thirsting for Stephen's presence, but now there was an unwonted weight on his tongue. Mr Aylward was fond of such sayings as that only the improbable is sure to happen; and he was never surprised to find any man, even his most intimate friend, acting in apparent defiance of his character. He went and stood by Philip's chair, laid his hand lightly but sympathetically on his shoulder and waited. As he supposed, only a

touch was needed to set the burden in motion. Lamond put up his hand to his friend's and holding it there on his shoulder began to speak with his eyes still fixed on the dancing flame. He began in a somewhat dull tone to repeat what Mr Hugo Deane had told him, but the suppressed excitement within him soon began to break through his speech. Stephen listened without a word knowing that his friend was always relieved by such an outpour and that here was more than usual need of relief. "As the words grow wilder the heart grows calmer," he said to himself.

When he had finished his story Philip was at fever heat once more. "She asks me to tell her what to do," he cried. "What shall I tell her? To sacrifice her young life to a weight of smudged paper? to the sweepings of old libraries? to the dregs of a shallow mind? Shall I tell her that her father is contemptible? You see how it is, Stephen. It drives me mad. She comes to me for help. God knows I need help."

Stephen felt the clutch of the hand on his and said softly, "You must think of her."

"Don't I think of her?"

"You are the man, you know. Poor old fellow! You must think of her only."



"You ask me to put my hand in the fire and not know that the hand is mine."

"I can't tell you how sorry I am for you, Philip." This sentence deserves to be chronicled as one of the warmest demonstrations of affection ever made by Mr Stephen Aylward. Lamond hardly noticed it at the time. He sprang up and walked about the room.

"Why should I give her up? She said it could not be right. It can't be right. It can't be right that she and I should be parted by this phantom, this nothing, this possibility of a book. Why, it makes me laugh."

It was a somewhat ghastly laugh, and Stephen was sorely troubled for his friend.

"It's too hard for me," Philip cried again; "too hard for me."

He threw himself face downward on the old faded couch caring only to shut out the light. Aylward looked at him with the tenderest pity; and yet he shrank from staring at his brave strong friend in a moment of extreme weakness. He went softly to the window and let in the cool pleasant air. Then, as he heard the other stir he went back to him again. The passion seemed to have passed; and Philip lay very still. Stephen thought that

he had better say that which must be said and have done with it.

"Philip," he said, "I know you will think for her. What he said is true. If you take her away, he will be a very poor man; he will have to do any work he can find; he has his wife and little Fabian to support. I know, for my father has told me, that he honestly thinks that he is fully entitled to the money by the last wish of his wife. You see you must face this. If she is nice, she will never be happy with you for thinking of her father. If she is not nice, you are the better for losing her."

"If she is not nice!" Then Philip Lamond got up slowly from the sofa. He was very pale and his eyes looked hollow and tired, as he held out his hand to his friend with a smile more sad than tears. Stephen was painfully anxious to speak words of comfort.

"If she is worthy she will wait for you," he said. "You can work for her."

"If she is worthy!" repeated Philip. "Don't ask me to hope. I doubt my work. I doubt my self." Then as he saw that the other would speak again he added quickly, "Thanks, old fellow. I daresay you are right. But I am tired. I want

to be alone for a bit. Good night. I daresay you are right."

"I am so tired of being right," said Stephen to himself looking at the door through which his poor friend had departed to loneliness. He sat tapping the table with his paper-knife and ruffling his brows in a discontented manner. "I am so tired of being right," he said again.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"If this prove  
A vision of the island."

So the next day came and the appointed hour of meeting.

As Cynthia drew near to Philip she was filled with wonder that a strong man should be so changed by love of her. She was full of pity and shame as he lifted his heavy head and looked at her with dull hollow eyes. He looked at her moodily, conscious of new life in her. She had been milking one of old Rosa's Swiss cows and as she stepped across the turf the little foot beneath the short petticoat seemed firmer and quicker of motion. The dark sleepy eyes had found a deeper depth and a new brightness. It was such a great thing to be loved. But to Philip Lamond it seemed that one so light of foot would feel small pain in parting; that eyes so bright would shed easy tears and smile

again. He told himself that he was glad of this; and nerved himself to face a further bitterness. Such were his thoughts as she came very softly and sweetly to him, and laying her two hands in his and looking up into his face waited for his words. For a few moments he gazed into her eyes yearning to find his suffering reflected there. Then he said gloomily, "It must be, I suppose."

Her lips trembled but she said nothing. Those trembling lips were so like a child's that Philip felt more strongly than ever the wickedness of standing between this young creature and her home. He held a blossom in his hand which he might take at will.

"I must go away," he said in the same dull tone.

"But you will come back some day?" she asked anxiously.

The question seemed to him intolerably conventional, asked by ten thousand girls who lightly part from light lovers.

"Don't talk of that," he said more quickly; "you are so young—you will learn to forget—you will see other men, better men than me—another will come—you will forget me—it's better so."

There was real pain in her face now, and she drew her hands from his as she asked, "Won't you come back? Don't you wish to come back?"

"I shall always wish it," he answered; "but don't ask me to deceive myself. I can work; but it must be years before I could take you to another home. You are so young—you don't know how long those years would be—you will forget me. It will come to be a little thing to you."

She came to him again as if she would promise; but he stopped her and went on quickly, "I should be a scoundrel to let you bind yourself. Only, if you ever want me, count on me as the same. I am much older than you; and I have seen a great deal; and I know myself; and I know that I can't change now. But you are a child and will forget. Believe me love it is best that you should forget me."

"I don't think that I can ever forget you, Philip."

Inexpressibly sweet was the sound of his name. Her words were simple and true. Yet he was certain that she deceived herself; certain that this child must forget him if he left her. In a moment he knew all that she was to him, and felt that like a fool he was leaving her for some other man. He was torn from his purpose by passionate rebellion against his fate.

"Oh, my love!" he cried, "I can't bear it! I can't give you up! It can't be right! You said

so yesterday, and it was your true heart that spoke. It can't be right, my love, my love!"

His voice was hoarse with passion. For good or ill he felt that he had decided for them both. But it was not so. There was a child's trouble on the young girl's lips, but the great eyes were very sad and solemn.

"But it is right," she said.

"You don't love me," he cried almost fiercely.

"Don't say that," she pleaded; and she laid her little hand on his arm.

"Then come with me," he said.

She had not answered when she felt something at her feet. Little Cecco the dog was writhing and curling himself into strange shapes which expressed affection. She stooped and lifted him in her arms.

"I should be cruel," she said, "to the father, and to Sara and to little Fabian. Philip you don't know how wisely my father spoke this morning. I have been wrong always. I have thought too much about myself. I have been so happy, and they have been worried and sad. And, Philip, I understand about the book now. It would be terrible that the chance of a great book should be lost for one girl. I never thought of that and of

them. I have been careless and wicked. What can it matter if I am married or not? And, Philip, I have remembered something. When my dear mother was dying she told me to take care of the father; and I have taken no care. I have been a wicked girl; and I must not look to please myself now."

"My angel!" Philip answered; "my little angel!" and could say no more. But full of reverence he bowed his head and kissed her small sunburnt hand. There was the sound of a boy's voice calling Cecco! Cecco! through the bushes. Cynthia dropped the dog, who conscious of his dignity as her protector kept his watchful inquisitive nose turned toward the intruder. "Let us have no romantic pirates here," he seemed to say with his little air of aggressive common-sense. Cecco is decidedly the child of his generation. He looked critically at the two young people, who had in a moment forgotten his existence. They stood hand in hand and looked into each other's eyes. The voice of little Fabian came nearer. "Never again," groaned Philip hardly knowing that he spoke. Then with great tenderness and sorrow he took her in his arms and kissed her. "Lost! lost!" he muttered as he held her there. Then with a



quick motion he put her from him, turned and dashed through the bushes. Cecco gave a sharp triumphant bark, and Fabian hearing it came running down the lawn.

Now the day was growing old and there was a strange quality in the air. Even Marco was silent, for a dense black cloud hung over Venice and the Venetian heart felt with the beloved city. Pressed low along the western waters was dull threatening red; but above it was a great fan-shaped mass, densely black, swelling grandly upward, vast and spreading afar. Yet this dense weight of cloud was torn about the edges, and from behind it triumphant from the hidden sun one great shaft of lurid light struck northward across the city, launched like an angel of Tintoret through the dumb expectant air. Waiting for the storm all Venice seemed unreal, fantastic with airy spires and domes, a thing of mists born of the darkling waters. Philip could not bear the vision. The massive cloud oppressed him as he sat with his elbows on his knees and his hands pressed hard against his temples. He was out on the bitter waters, and she was not with him. He was hot and angry with his fate. Again and again he told himself that he had lost her, till he sickened of

the ceaseless repetition. He was out on the bitter waters; and the enchanted island which he had left was slowly sinking to the brine. Slowly the mists crept up and wrapped it for its burial. A chill slow air crept in from the sea, and at its touch perfume and music died. "Present fears are less than horrible imaginings." Philip Lamond started and looked round. There the island lay still and dark upon the water. He felt the fury of his passionate longing to go back, and was afraid. Then he turned his face steadfast toward the city and vowed that he would be strong.



II.



## CHAPTER IX.

"Ay, but hearken, sir; though the chameleon Love can feed on the air, I am one that am nourished by my victuals."

"POOR little one!" sighed the Contessa Belrotoli; "she has early known that it is the lot of woman to suffer."

As she spoke she shuddered visibly in Lady Lappin's chair of honour, and turned her most eloquent eye quickly to the Captain Tiribomba, and back again to Mr Playdell, who had taken a second gondolier that he might bring her the story more quickly. She rewarded him with her kindest glance; and there was a strange power in the Contessa's glances, partly due to the inequality of her eyes. It was hard to tell what made the fascination of this little brown woman.

"Ah, but for art!" cried Lady Lappin standing motionless and directing her gaze upwards. "Is

it not woman's privilege to sacrifice herself for art?"

"Pardon me," said the Captain Tiribomba with a little short bow; "is it art to make a history?"

The Captain was inconveniently fond of improving himself. Lady Lappin was a little uncertain about the definition of art. She only answered with a sigh. Her husband Sir Rupert who had been flitting uneasily about his guests now ventured on a question. He glanced at his wife, drew his hand across his lips as if anxious to be convinced of their existence before putting them to use, and then boldly ventured on speech.

"How do you know, Playdell—I mean, of course you know, you know. But how do you know about Deane's marriage settlement, and all that, eh?"

He felt that he had perhaps gone a little too far, and looked an ample apology. But Bonamy was in no mood to take offence. He was sitting back in his chair smooth, benignant, at rest. He felt that he had done his duty. He had borne the news, he had told the story, and not in vain. The Belrotoli had been stung to a spasmodic interest. Lady Lappin staring with round eyes and mouth had forgotten to consider the fall of her soft white draperies. Even Tiribomba had kept his high cold

glasses fixed on the story-teller, and had jerked a question about English law which remained unanswered. A smile of almost infantine sweetness was on Bonamy's rosy lips. His plump and shapely hands were lightly crossed before him. A double portion of peace was on his peaceful spirit. His smile grew wider as he listened to the embarrassed question of Sir Rupert.

"How do I know!" he said raising his eyebrows and creasing his white forehead at Lady Lappin, who by a look suggested caution to her lord; "why, my dear Lappin, Hugo Deane is one of my oldest and dearest friends, and so was his first wife, and so was her father old Aylward who made those settlements, as he made everything, to suit his own ideas. A dear old obstinate man, and my particular friend; and his son too the great lawyer; and his boy too young Stephen who is here,—all friends—all my very good friends."

"He is adorable that youth Stephano," said the Countess whose attention had wandered; "delicate gentil sympatica, so fair, and with those deep-set dark eyes, and the smile mocking, a little malicious. Yes, he is adorable."

"I was mixed up in that marriage," continued Mr Playdell after a period of meditation, "from



the very beginning. I may almost say that I made the match."

He liked to connect himself with his beloved anecdotes. It was a languid afternoon and the light was veiled. The room was pleasant and cool in the eyes of Bonamy, and the women also. Lady Lappin severe as a muse was draped in white. The long amber train of the Contessa curled with serpentine grace upon the floor. Wooed by such influences Bonamy wandered back among his pleasant memories, flitting from scandal to scandal so tenderly that he scarce brushed the bloom from the most delicate reputation. His audience listened and did not listen while they awaited tea. At last he alighted once more on the Deane family.

"And that girl will marry Cheepyre," he said; "it was always intended from her birth. I could tell you a story."

"Now do," said Lady Lappin persuasively.

Bonamy softly chuckled.

"Everybody knew it," he said; "it never was a secret from me; I was the friend of both parties. Harriet Cheepyre was desperately in love with Hugo Deane before she married Cheepyre. It could not be. I showed them both that it could

not be. There was no money. They were both dear friends of mine."

"And he?" asked the Belrotoli; "did he feel the same passion?"

Mr Playdell shook his head slowly and smiled meaningly.

"He was not sorry to go abroad," he said; "and there he married; and she married Cheepyre who kept the hounds. But when Hugo's girl was born, she made up her mind that this girl should marry her boy. I know it. Women have those fancies, have they not Contessa?"

"I can fancy that," said the Belrotoli, "if she did not rather kill him. And women loved him then—this cold Mr Deane?"

"Yes," said Bonamy meditatively, "he was always attractive to women."

"Yes. We are fools! all fools!" cried the Italian woman fiercely.

There was a pause, and then the Captain Tiri-bomba who had been sitting upright and silent behind the Belrotoli's chair asked another question.

"Pardon me," he began, "but from whence did you receive the rest of the story, that this friend of your young Aylward had offered for the hand of the miss, and had been sent on his business?"

"Tiribomba," said the Contessa graciously, "you ask always what I wish to know. A thousand thanks."

"Come now, Mr Playdell," said his hostess, "when ladies ask you."

"Yes now," ventured Sir Cornelius finding that the Captain had not been snubbed for asking questions.

They were all waiting ; but Bonamy seemed coy and reluctant. He rippled with silent laughter, and the rosy colour deepened on his plump cheek. At last with an air of putting the matter aside he said, "Women must talk of these things. They can't keep them to themselves."

"You do not say that the girl told you?" cried the Belrotoli sweeping round upon him.

"No, no, no!" said he, deprecating the mere notion.

"It was not the mother. She would not dare."

"Mrs Deane did not tell me directly," said Bonamy with a chuckle.

"Wicked one!" cried the Contessa with a great swish and rustle of her gown. "I see how you know. She told it to Miss Lindley ; and Miss Lindley, she told it to you. I am mad with jealousy."

Mr Playdell put up his hands in deprecation.

"Fie, then! You wicked one; you go every day; you are her confessor."

Lady Lappin, whose years of finishing on Clapham Common were a sad check on her passion for artistic liberty, thought that this badinage had gone far enough.

"Rupert my dear," she said, "will you see why they don't bring tea?"

The Contessa had sunk back into moody abstraction, when Stephen Aylward was announced. She was vivacious again in an instant.

"You have come well, Stephano," she cried darting a slender hand towards him. "We are eaten up by interest in this tragic history. Where is he, your friend, who poses? How is he? Has he gone away? And his heart—how is that?"

Stephen wore his expression of hesitation and his provoking smile as he took her hand. He had a keen appreciation of this fascinating woman, but a strong disinclination to speak of his friend's affairs to her. So he bowed low and said with a great air of deference, "I am no judge of hearts. I wish that the Contessa Belrotoli would give me lessons in insight."

"Impertinent!" cried she; and Lady Lappin came bustling up and brimming over with curiosity.

"Ah, but you must tell us. Come now. We are so much interested in poor Mr Lamond. We feel for him so much. He must suffer for he has the artist soul. A little rough perhaps in manner; but *we* see farther. We know the sensitiveness of the artistic nature. How is he?"

"Very well, thank you," said Stephen.

"Very well!" exclaimed Lady Lappin in a tone of disappointment.

"Philip is tough enough. He has gone to paint in Florence. There is a picture in the Pitti which he wants to copy."

"Ah! but his disappointment? Surely he has a heart?"

"Are hearts so easily damaged?" demanded Stephen of the Contessa.

"Wretch!" answered she, "you try to play with us; but we do not care a fig. Your friend has gone. Let him go. Va." And she blew him from the tips of her fingers.

"Here come those incomparable muffins," said Stephen; and Lady Lappin shook her fat forefinger at him.

The Belrotoli abandoned herself to tea; Tiri-bomba ate muffins sternly, and as if uncertain of his dinner; Sir Rupert tumbled over the foot-

stool in his efforts to be useful ; and his wife forgot the beautiful for a moment in the joy of supplying her friends with food. There was peace in the room, and plenty. Mr Playdell alone would not yield to temptation. He shook his head mildly but firmly, and ever and anon he smiled at some pleasant thought which he kept for his private enjoyment. Time gliding by seemed to pat him on the shoulder, and he answered with a placid look. He was the spoiled darling of Time, who smoothed the wrinkles which he drew.

At last however Bonamy began to manifest signs of some uneasiness. He directed some nods and becks towards Stephen with meaning sideward indications of Sir Rupert Lappin. As young Aylward seemed obstinately blind to his hints, he even began to fidget in his easy-chair. At length with a transparent assumption of carelessness he rose, and sauntering to the window called Stephen to observe an effect. "Curious, isn't it?" he asked; then catching the young man by the button of his coat he added in a stage whisper, "Come and dine. I've ordered a little dinner at the Florian. Hush! or Lappin will hear, or Tiribomba. He's a very hungry man the Capitano."

It was a beautiful sight to see Bonamy Playdell

at dinner. His rosy cheeks appeared to the best advantage above snowy tablecloth and napkin. He shone like the silver. The soup was excellent before him ; and there could be no better promise of a good dinner to come. " It's not the Anglais," he observed with his spoonful of soup waiting in the air, " nor the Trois Frères in its best days ; but you can get your dinner good if you show them that you know." He had shown his knowledge, and that soup was the result. Stephen sitting opposite to his friend looked at him with pleasure. He at times delighted in Mr Playdell, and this evening was in the mood for a good dinner. In this matter he was remarkably capricious, being for the most part abstemious, a lover of simplicity and neatness, but on occasions an exquisite epicure. He had a fine natural taste for wines and dishes, which excited the respect and increased the affection of the more experienced diner. Bonamy's heart warmed towards the youth when he marked his appreciation of that soup. He felt as a father towards him, or conscious of his own perennial bloom, as an elder brother. " Another spoonful," he said ; " the fish cannot be worth much."

Stephen was ready to be pleased. Philip Lamond had written from Florence a letter more sensible

than his letters were apt to be. He asked for news of the Deanes; but when Stephen turned the page, half-pitiful half-amused and prepared to wade through the flood of irrepressible feelings, he found to his surprise that the subject had been abruptly dropped. The rest of the letter was full of critical remarks on the Pitti and Uffizi pictures and ended with a scheme of work which would have taken a lifetime. Stephen was surprised but reassured. He was in the habit of regarding his friend as a young bull who fell into pits and scrambled out of them somehow. Out of the present pit into which he had most gratuitously blundered, he was likely to deliver himself by steady work. So the young mentor had written a brief answer, in which he praised the ambition of doing more work in a year than Lionardo had been able to accomplish in his long life; and after sinking from the satirical tone to one as nearly affectionate as he could bear, and having posted the letter with his own hand, he was ready to dine with a light heart, and with Mr Bonamy Playdell. For sorrow could not live in the atmosphere of Mr Bonamy Playdell.

As the sun disperses the mist so before the beaming countenance of this David, who had



passed his youth in no rough journeyings amid the mountains, the vapours of grief melted away. Not that the little gentleman was wanting in sympathy or sentiment. Far from it. The wide range of his sympathies, and the easy flow of his sentiments had endeared him to generations of men. Indeed as a young man he had carried with him so bounteous a supply of sympathy and of so agreeable a quality, that he to some extent created the demand which he satisfied. Young persons of both sexes, who had rubbed along without much thought of their higher needs, discovered on meeting the youthful Bonamy that they had been heretofore misunderstood, and must straightway unburden themselves. The process of laying down the burden before those neatly-turned feet was so delightful that the young people looked about for burdens if they had them not. So young men and maidens came trooping and bearing each his own or her own private parcel; and Bonamy in the vigour of early manhood had sympathy and sentiment for all. Often his eyes were suffused with tears as he listened, and his voice and his touch were comfortable. It must be confessed that, as he grew older, Mr Playdell came by slow degrees to think more of the stories and less of the story-

tellers; to attach a higher value to the anecdotes for their own sake, and for the added value which they gave him in the eyes of eligible people. But though he loved to turn over his stock of sentimental stories, and to produce the right one at the right opportunity, he never ceased to think kindly of those who had confided their troubles to him. He certainly was not aware of any diminution in his stock of sympathy. He would not believe that a man of heart and of such excellent intentions could make mischief in the world. Those who brought this accusation against him seemed to him mischievous and malicious people, and unworthy of his attention. Those who told him of these accusations appeared no better than tale-bearers. So Bonamy retained his wealth and freshness of feeling in spite of bolder curves; and never was he in a mood more happy and more tender than on that evening at the Caffè Florian. Early in the days of his sojourn at Venice he had discovered some remarkable claret, and the bottle before him was exceptionally good and of the exact temperature which he preferred. Not later than the removal of the fish, which proved better than he had dared to hope, Mr Playdell was passing from the congratulatory to the sentimental stage. He re-

turned to the story which he had told with such good effect in the afternoon. He was touched by the thought of the poor little girl. Indeed he averred that he had never known anything more touching. "A sweet young thing," he said; "poor little girl! *Poverina!* Waiter! *Garçon!* *Un altro: Grazie.* There is nothing so pathetic as first love. You should have another of these *raviôles*. They are delicious. *Dammi ancora dei raviuoli.*" His Italian, if not always correct, was the softest in the world. He purred in Italian. He glided imperceptibly into recitative. "*Dammi ancor'*," he said or sang; and the German waiter who recognised all languages waited on him with affection and the certainty of compensation. But the sentiment grew deeper as the dinner passed away. Stephen, who had allowed his attention to wander to Philip in the Uffizi, was suddenly alarmed by a tremendous sigh. His companion had sunk back in his chair. His head drooped toward his left shoulder; his face wore an expression of regret and resignation; his left hand hung limp from the lappel of his coat, and his right toyed with the stem of the claret-glass before him. When he saw that his young friend's attention was attracted he made haste to blush, and to raise his glass to his lips. "Shall

we go outside?" he asked with an appearance of covering his confusion. In the subdued light of the Piazza he waxed bolder. The band was playing; the polyglot waiter brought coffee. Bonamy sat in shadow and marked the streams of people pass through the uncertain moonlight. On most of the little wooden tables around him were coffee or ices. It was not his nature to resist the influences of the time all tempting to confession. He sighed again, but less deeply.

"You have no idea what a lovely girl she was," he murmured drawing his chair nearer to Stephen's.

"Who?"

"Lily — Miss Lindley. I was talking with her to-day of old times—of old times. '*Tempora mutantur, nos et,*' you know." He loved his little bit of Latin. "Poor girl!" he continued, "they called her the Lily of Limeshire. Lord Lewgram was mad about her; and Ralph Betts, and a host of others. She was lovely."

The band was playing "*La donna e mobile*" in their most pathetic manner, and Bonamy who was enchanted by the melodies of Verdi could scarce restrain a tear. Meanwhile a possibility had flashed across the mind of Stephen Aylward which filled him with glee. "Any one can see that Miss

Lindley was a great beauty," he said respectfully. "Indeed she might put forward no small claims now if she were not so modest, and almost too well-bred."

"You see that?" asked Mr Playdell eagerly. "You do not often see such ladies nowadays. They were laughing this afternoon at the Palazzo; but who knows? I confess that were I a younger man"—and he paused.

"You? Why, you are as young as ever; younger than I ever was," cried Stephen brimming over with delight half angelic half diabolic. He felt like a merry young Mephistopheles beguiling a middle-aged Faust. Oh my dear doctor allow me to persuade you that you are not half so old as you think, nor the charming Gretchen either. Permit me to insert this gimlet in the table, and lo! the fountain of youth. These aerated waters are most refreshing after dinner. The streams of people passing up and down were but half real in the faint moonlight. Like phantoms marching and counter-marching they filled the great Piazza and moved from end to end. The elderly Faust felt his soul expand, and threw open his coat that he might sigh more freely. There was still love and beauty in the world. In moments like these he felt that

other people's love affairs were not sufficient for him. The band had passed from Verdi to Gounod, and Bonamy warmed himself at the music. "O Margarita!" he sang under his breath, with the tenor voice somewhat worn and tremulous. "O Margarita!" and there rose before him once more the vision of the Gretchen whom he half believed that he had loved. He almost persuaded himself that evening that the Lily of Limeshire had inspired the one love of his life. The air was so soft, the light so tender, that it was impossible that he had not loved her. Young Mephistopheles would not disturb this dream, and Dr Faustus remained silent in an atmosphere of peace.

"Halloa, Bonnie! my noble sportsman, how are you?" It was a young and lively voice which spoke, and a vigorous hand which poked Mr Playdell in the shoulder. Stephen Aylward looking up with a start saw a figure of average height attired in a long straight coat of decided pattern, and above it the face of a wordly-wise cherub at once boyish and knowing. The new-comer examined Mr Playdell as if he were looking over a horse. "In pretty good fettle," he said shortly.

"My dear Freddy," cried Bonamy when he had recovered his breath, "and what brings you here?"

But I needn't ask; and how is your dear mother? This is nice. Stephen my dear boy I don't know if you know Freddy, one of my oldest friends, and the son of my oldest and best friends. Stephen—Freddy—that is, Mr Aylward—Lord Cheeepyre."

## CHAPTER X.

"This bud of love by summer's ripening breath  
May prove a beauteous flower."

ONCE in former days, when the little Cynthia had been sent from Cheapstowe to Venice that she might make the acquaintance of her step-mother, she was lost in a crowd who thronged the Great Piazza. Her father who was returning to work sought her with anxiety and annoyance, and Mrs Deane had to bear the double duty of soothing her husband's fears and hiding her own. They sought the child, as was natural, under the shady colonnades, and hoped to find her staring into some bright shop-window. Mr Deane was alternately in the depth of despair and at the height of vexation, when it occurred to his wife to look into the church of Saint Mark. There sat the little girl lost in a dream. The child's eyes noted no details of ornament, nor marks of damage and squalor.



She was in a palace of glowing chastened gold, soft light, drowsy perfume of incense, and music sounding low. Visions came thick upon her of the temple of Solomon and the palace of al Raschid. There was myrrh and cassia to lull her to sleep. Gorgeous peacocks and decorous apes moved to the music which filled her with too great delight. When her father and the strange new mother came abruptly through her dream, she looked at them with dazed eyes. Mr Deane was shocked by her want of consideration for others, her culpable thoughtlessness. She had kept him for an hour from his work, and had given him the keenest anxiety. He spoke sharply, and she was full of regret. But the impression made on the young by a scolding is not apt to last. Cynthia was careful for the future not to stray when her parents took her for a walk. For the rest, they were such good companions for each other that the child sank back upon herself, upon her day-dreams, and joy in colour and music.

So life had passed for the little girl now among green pastures deep lanes and hedgerows gay with bindweed and honeysuckle, the fair surroundings of the ancient manor of Cheapstowe; now larger and deeper on the brooding waters of Venice, flushed by new sunlight, suggesting

old memories. The child's little world was moreover made alive by music. Music spoke close to her heart as nothing else could speak. All beauty which she loved longed for musical expression. Often her eyes filled with tears for pity of the dumbness of a flaming sky, a dim church, a harmonious picture. There were pictures which seemed to her imprisoned melodies, the work of simple souls who worked with deep joy in colour, but with sweet gravity and delicate half-unconscious humour. She knew little of the most powerful masters. She wondered at Titian's royal colour which thrilled her but seemed to take away her breath. She was a little troubled by the grand pageantry of Veronese. She was more than half afraid of the movement of Tintoretto. But she loved the face of the sleeping Saint Ursula, who gave her thoughts of her mother that was gone away; and she loved the two boy angels, divine and human child-musicians, so childlike careful of heavenly instruments. She loved all such work and the authors of it; and first of all and dearest was Giovanni Bellini. She felt as if she knew him, as if he talked familiarly with her. Whenever she had the chance, she found her way into the great church of the Frari, and passing with

a respectful glance a masterpiece of Titian, went to a little chapel where her picture was, glowing with colour and light, yet temperate and pure. There the Madonna sits calm and still with a mother's smile and eyes and holds her baby on her knees. Her chair is made most beautiful for her with inlaid marbles and consummate grace of workmanship, for the painter has worked on it like a cunning craftsman and with most loving care and delicacy of design. On the steps, quiet and happy by the Mother's feet two children rest and make music for the child. From this chapel Cynthia always came as if from prayer. She had been nearer heaven; and returning looked with more tender pity on the world. Indeed she was fond of all restful pictures, as she was fond of rest. Her teachers had always said that she was amiable, but idle; and Lady Chee pyre had complained a thousand times that the child's education was too often interrupted. No sooner was the little Cynthia fairly launched on a prescribed course at Cheapstowe, than she was whisked off in an instant to forget in Italy. She had a wonderful power of forgetting, and inexhaustible sweetness of temper under rebuke. The latest aids to knowledge were provided, sciences compressed into pamphlets, the

history of literature marvellously arranged in a hundred concentrated paragraphs; but it was all to no purpose. She recognised the flowers when she walked but forgot their scientific denominations. She got the wonderful little paragraphs all out of order, was whole centuries wrong in her dates, and obstinately remembered picturesque legends which had been long discredited. In short she grew up a young lady not too well informed. Even in music, at which she worked hard if not regularly, her taste was too eccentric for a girl; she played for the most part to please herself. She was like an enchanted maiden left alone in some high tower, whence she looked forth upon her narrow world, and accompanied it on her piano. People passed like moving pictures; some nearer, as her father and his wife, the little Fabian, Lady Cheeppyre, and her boy friend Freddie; others seen dimly afar. She looked out wondering and her little world was full of blameless romance and soft colours; it filled her thoughts. There was so much to see, and so much music to seek. If for a moment she fancied herself an actor in this world or caught a fleeting vision of some romance for herself, she turned from the thought with a shiver. So had

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the little Cynthia lived and mused, until she was little no longer.

Then on a sudden all the world was changed. Out from among the passing shadows came somebody very real—a knight young and strong who would take no denial. There was ruin and disorder before him. The little watch-tower crumbled at his coming; and the girl was out in the world with men and women around her. And she too was a woman—a woman who loved, and said Good-bye to her lover. When Philip went away, he left Cynthia staring about her like one newly awakened, and with a troubled conscience. She told herself that long before she should have learned to think of the wishes of these people close around her; that she had been selfish and wicked. Full of these new thoughts and this new trouble, she wasted no time in vain regrets. As a matter of course and with much simplicity she looked about for something to do. There was work close to her hand.

As the days grew hotter, little Fabian became somewhat pale and listless, and ran about less. It was some time before his mother perceived this; but when she did, she abandoned herself to an anxiety which struck her husband as irrational.

Forcing himself to regard his son critically and dispassionately Mr Deane found but little the matter.

"My dear Sara," he said, "I do wish for your own sake that you would not fret about our boy. Give yourself occupation ; occupation will help you to divert your thoughts. Fabian is a little under the weather ; only a little under the weather."

The presence of his wife had become a necessary accompaniment to his work, and he had a great mass of scribbled notes which must be fairly copied. Hugo had a deep antipathy to this sort of drudgery.

"No, no," he said testily to Cynthia, who surprised him by an offer of help ; "thank you dear, but I am accustomed to Sara's writing. Thank you, but I must get on by myself. Shut the door, please : thank you."

He was conscious of a change in his daughter, and could not readily adjust himself to this new member of his household. He was vexed because Cynthia was a woman. It was preposterous that she should be loved. He felt keenly that people would talk about this matter—might consider him as under some sort of obligation to his own child. It was clear that he must treat her with consideration ; and he would do so. He was pleased to think

that she would receive his politeness with astonishment, and look at him as an inscrutable being. Yet proud of her, vexed with her, grateful to her, jealous of her probable growth, he found it hard to preserve a single manner in addressing her. One moment he displayed a studied consideration; the next he was a little snappish. It was an uncomfortable fact that she had stepped out of place, and occupied an undue share of his thoughts. To please a man of refined taste, the setting should be always subordinate to the central jewel.

"There is nothing the matter with the boy," said Mr Deane in the presence of his daughter but apparently addressing the curtain. "Eh? What? Quite so. You think that it is nothing. Nothing serious? Of course it is nothing serious. I never should have believed that poor Sara would have been so irrational; have shown so much obstinacy, so little consideration for others."

"O Padre," said Cynthia who felt bound to speak but very sorry for the enforced silence of the curtain. "O Padre, I am sure that she does think of others; she is so good. I think she thinks too much of others—I mean too little of herself; and she'll make herself ill; and I think she looks ill already."

"Nonsense, Cynthia," said Mr Deane tartly; "don't be fanciful. Women are always fancying illness in themselves or other people. I've enough to think of without being bothered by uncomfortable fancies. Women are all alike. Run away, there's a good child; and mind you shut the door."

Thus Cynthia's interviews with her father ended for the most part with the door. Nor did she meet with much more success in her efforts to help her step-mother. Sara was not without that last infirmity of good women—jealousy. If some beneficent fairy had bidden her choose a gift, she would have chosen the power of being in two places at once, that she might minister at the same time to her husband and her boy. Now the elfin Fabian was very capricious in showing affection to any one but Cecco, and his mother wanted it all. If in an extravagant mood he flung himself into Cynthia's arms and kissed her again and again, Sara was horrified at the bitterness of her own feelings. Moreover she was accustomed to believe in the helplessness of her step-daughter, and she was very slow to change a habit of thought. So Cynthia's interference roused a gentle but obstinate opposition, and on one remarkable occasion a spark



of anger, which was as surprising as the explosion of a wax-doll. Cynthia had begged her to take care of herself, and had told her that she looked ill. Mrs Deane turned on her like a dragon.

"How can you talk like that?" she cried. "Do you want me to neglect my own child, my poor boy that's ill? And you will go and tell your father, as if he had not enough to bother him; and you know that I am never ill—never!" And the little lady whisked away with her heart full and left Cynthia staring and speechless. Then the girl went away, as she was very apt to go, and milked old Rosa's cows. She felt that she was of some use when she saved a stiff old back from stooping, and she loved the sweet smell of kine and their large patient eyes. Old Rosa, to whom the beasts were a most valuable possession, overflowed with gratitude and prattled among the ringing milk-pails of Beppo and Angeluccio and merry days among the vineyards of her youth.

"Yes, I could sing when I was like the damigella, young and smooth. Yes, and dance too. A little wine, and I can dance now with the best." And she began capering about on the brick floor. "Love and wine and youth among the heavy vines—but the damigella must excuse me; I grow old

and talkative, as my old fox of a husband tells me a thousand times a-day."

Cynthia looked at the old woman with large eyes, and wondered if she herself would be as merry if old age and rheumatism should come to her. When she was not helping Rosa out of doors, the lazy nurse Vittoria was glad of assistance within. Vittoria loved to lounge half out of window and chirp to the lizards. Lolling in sunlight she would rouse herself so far as to complain of the amount of her work and the impish activity of that rascal the young master. Of late he had certainly been more quiet; and this quietude together with the new helpfulness of her young lady Vittoria gratefully attributed to the goodwill of Saint George, who had been always attentive to her wants. So Cynthia mended the little Fabian's garments, milked old Rosa's cows, and was patient if not happy. Sometimes at quiet hours she stole away to the place where she had opened her eyes in the tree's shadow and seen her king. There she allowed herself to dream a little while, to hope all good things for him, perhaps to pray a little with her face close to the cool slender grass. Then she would rise calm and of good courage and go about her work. Day followed

day each fresh and fair but bringing no change; until at last came one with the shock of a new presence. Cynthia was standing by her favourite tree and her thoughts were far away, when she started at the sound of a familiar voice.

"How goes it?" asked a youth behind her, and turning she beheld Lord Cheepry, who had assumed that cool and matter-of-course air on which he prided himself.

"Freddie! I am glad," cried she with undisguised pleasure. "I can't imagine you here. Why have you come?"

She put out her hand, then half drew back with a blush and a sudden fear that he would kiss her as he used to do. And why not? she thought, and was angry with herself for being silly. Yet something had happened which made her greet her old playmate awkwardly.

"George! You are in looks!" said the youth half forgetting his indifference. She laughed, and blushed again under the eye which seemed so extravagantly knowing and critical.

"Have you seen the padre?" she asked.

"No. I've just come. I got a chap to shove me across."

Cynthia put out her lip at this description of the

gondolier's art. "Come," she said; and as she led him towards the house she pointed out the beauties of the island which he accepted without enthusiasm.

"Padre, who do you think has come? Look here! Here's Freddie."

Mr Deane turned slowly from his papers and regarded the young man with some disfavour. Neither the check suit nor the air of assurance were pleasing to his eye. He allowed his hand to be shaken, and uttered the proper expressions of pleasures. "And your mother? I hope that your mother is quite well."

"Fit as a fiddle."

"Indeed!" Mr Deane bowed slightly as if truly grateful for this reassuring account of Lady Chee pyre's health. Although somewhat irritated, he was not surprised by the young man's arrival. He had written to Lady Chee pyre after his disagreeable interview with Philip Lamond; and here was the answer to his letter. Yet he was vexed. He had abstained from suggesting any course of action, and had thus, with a diplomacy which he did not confess to himself, reserved the right of disapproval. He knew how eager his old friend was for the union of the families and how prompt she was for action. But on this occasion she had

been too quick; his taste was offended. It was altogether too sudden. There was something almost indelicate in flinging him another young man because the last was ineligible. He was not propitiated by the demeanour of the envoy-extraordinary. When he looked up he found himself regarded by a coolly critical eye which did not sink before his own. He wondered if the youth knew the meaning of his journey. "What made you think of paying us a visit?" he asked with an effort at cordiality.

"Well," answered Lord Cheepry meditatively, and deliberately selecting a chair, "I'm sure I don't know. The mother talked about it; and the hunting was over."

"Whatever the reason of your coming," said Mr Deane with the civility proper to a host, "we shall try to make your stay pleasant. You must take us as you find us. We live a very simple life. I am much occupied, as you know; but there is my wife and Cynthia. Would you like to see your room?"

"Oh, thanks. But old Lappin has put me up."

"O Freddie!" cried Cynthia disappointed.

"Sir Rupert?" questioned her father dryly. "I did not know that you were acquainted."

"I wasn't till yesterday. I found old Bonamy

over there. He dragged me off to the Countess What's-her-name's. And the Lappins were uncommon civil; and I must say they do me uncommonly well."

"I am delighted to hear it. I presume that we shall see something of you. Perhaps you will come over to-morrow at noon to breakfast, or luncheon as you would call it."

"I'm afraid I can't come to-morrow. I've promised to go on a picnic or something. I should have liked to come; but I promised the Italian woman."

"Indeed! The Belrotoli is not in the habit of giving picnic parties. You must have made yourself very agreeable."

"Well, you see, she asks; but I expect the Lappins part. Isn't that about the size of it? She's a 'cute woman, the Countess. She knows how to cut her own grass."

"Indeed!" said Mr Deane frigidly; and he began to push about his papers. Thereupon Lord Cheepyre got up in leisurely fashion.

"I'll look in on you again," he said; but the man of letters did not manifest any extravagant emotion at the prospect.

## CHAPTER XI.

"She's a most triumphant lady, if report be square to her."

THE Contessa stood on the marble steps of the Palazzo Belrotoli. Under the large hat with its drooping plume her eyes glittered with animation. Her long gown curled round her feet. With rapid speech and gesture she indicated the arrangement of the party. There was an extraordinary sparkle and decision about her. She turned on this side and on that. Nothing escaped her. She seemed to look in both directions at once. She volubly rated one of Lady Lappin's boatmen for not bearing his livery with a better discretion; and though the delinquent was on her right hand, she was yet keenly conscious of the glare of Tiribomba's glasses on her left. The Captain was silent and cold as a stone. He had been briefly bidden to accompany Sir Rupert in the leading gondola. Sir Rupert was

in a fever of anxiety about the rugs and cushions. He stumbled up and down the steps, and would most certainly have tumbled into the water had not Tiribomba arrested him by the collar of the coat and steered him to his place. He could not be still. Out he came again. "A little moment," he explained apologetically to his servant. "Thanks. My love, are you sure you prefer the Austrian blanket? I can get the fur in an instant." All the time he tried to smile in an easy holiday manner; but his eyes were pathetic and his mouth would form nothing more cheerful than an ogre's grin.

"Do not speak of wraps," cried the Belrotoli; and the little man fell back as if a rocket had been sent off under his nose;—"do not speak of them if you love me; and I am sure that you love me—is it not so, Sir Rupert?" She rapped him with her long fan. "Your wife allows. But wraps? It is as hot as—as brimstone. You may have all the furs and the blankets until we come back—you and Tiribomba. Enter!"

She shot a glance at the Captain, who bowed stiffly, and taking Sir Rupert by the arm placed him without a word in the first gondola, and stepped in after him. Their boatmen called to each other, and forthwith they darted away.



"Now you, Mr Bonamy—you will take care of Miss Lindley, if she does not fear you. You are a terrible man, but to-day we trust you. Enter! Quick! This is your boat—this next one."

Mr Playdell loved to think that he looked on Venice with the eyes of Byron. Standing with one foot on the step above him and extending his hand to the lady he felt something of the Corsair within him, as if he were still a boy. Miss Lindley was blushing and quivering as he handed her into the boat. She could never reconcile her ideas of perfect breeding with the manners of this Italian lady of unimpeachable pedigree. She trembled before those jokes and stares. She was no whit bolder in her treatment of the other sex than the Lily of former days. Experience had done nothing for her. Fears of indelicacy had prevented her from extending her knowledge by observation of mankind. As she laid her slim hand on Mr Playdell's, she was tremulous as a school-girl, doubtful of the gentleman's meaning as of that of the Captain Saunders of her first ball, ignoring her own feelings as was maidenly before clear manifestation of wooing.

"And now it is our turn," cried the Contessa. "Lord Cheeypyre, you will come with us; my lady

Lappin and I have kept you for ourselves. We are horribly selfish and must have the best. We shall show you everything."

The rosy youth was finishing a big cigar, and he tossed away the end as he followed the ladies into the little black cabin which Lady Lappin retained in her best gondola, because it pleased the Belrotoli. Formerly the Grand Canal had been honoured by the state gondola of that ancient family, with its splendid yellow liveries and worsted trimmings; but, as the Lappins kept two boats, it had struck both the Contessa and her husband that the days of ostentation were over. It was no more than kind to give employment to their friends' servants, who in English households were apt to become lazy and mischievous.

There was bustle enough at the start of the three gondolas, for many loungers had gathered together offering advice and laughter. They jested under the eyes of the Belrotoli who was popular and loved their merriment; and they mocked the Lappin domestics whom they had known in more hungry days. One swaggered on the steps in imitation of a fat man's walk and a great man's dignity, rolling in the sunshine and in ecstasy with his own humour. Another humbly begged to have

the gondoliers' silken sashes when their waists had outgrown them.

"Silence!" cried the Contessa from beneath the *felze*; "silence, children!" Then "Forward!" she cried again to the boatmen, and was swept away from the popular mirth.

So off went the three boats to the Lido under fair auspices and in holiday weather. But the holiday temper prevailed not equally in all. Even the most comfortable conveyance will not insure a comfortable mood. As black care springs to the quarters of the old gentleman's cob, so will that lesser demon restlessness slip in among the cushions of the easiest gondola. Alone with Tiribomba Sir Rupert was undeniably restless. For all his familiarity with the world he had never wholly conquered his distrust of foreigners. He needed support in their presence, especially the support of his wife, who was scornful of insular prejudice, who had bloomed out to dimensions unsuited to a moderate island. Of all foreigners Tiribomba was most alarming in the baronet's eyes. He was so little like the Italian of British caricature—so motionless and stiff, so silent, and when he spoke, so abrupt in speech, so pertinent in question—that Sir Rupert regarded him nervously and furtively as a living

riddle which it was impossible to give up. Alone in a narrow boat with this embarrassing person, the Englishman fidgeted, shifted himself on his seat, bit his nails, patted his mouth and chin, and tried hard to think of something which would serve to break the silence.

"There's nothing so comfortable as a gondola, is there, eh? So luxurious, so peaceful." The Captain expressed his agreement by a bow and stared straight before him through the glasses perched upon his nose. A period of silence ensued during which Sir Rupert twisted himself round every minute to see if his wife were coming. "I think I see them—oh yes, I think that must be them, yes," he ventured to remark at last; but Tiribomba treated the observation as a soliloquy. "What a very striking hat," continued the baronet after a pause during which he had been casting about for an agreeable subject; "very striking but most becoming I'm sure. I mean the hat which the Contessa——"

"A wonderful thing the torpedo!" said the Captain grimly.

"Wonderful," hastily assented Sir Rupert; "but——"

"I direct him at the following gondola of my lady your wife. I arrange him to go below the

water. There is a touch, a bang-bang; then are all dead. A wonderful thing! I have one here."

"Where?" cried the other with a jump.

"I fancy I have one. I direct him." And Tiri-bomba looked sternly backward at the frail craft which bore the Contessa Belrotoli. A long silence followed full of uneasy feelings for the little baronet. At last his companion again broke silence with a suddenness which made his heart flutter. "I shall go to the middle of Africa," he said. "I rust in this idleness. I shall offer myself to the Government. They will be glad to be relieved of me. You would not care to come? No?"

"No thanks. I should like it very much; but my engagements, and Lady Lappin, and—— I'm sure it's very kind of you to think of it. Does the Contessa think of going?"

"No."

In the second boat was more animation. Bonamy was inclined to carol like the lark. As they neared the entrance of the Grand Canal he glanced up at the great church of Santa Maria della Salute with a keen sense of sympathy. Swelling upward, domed and broad and big, adorned at every curve with scrolls and flourishes and twisted draperies, all white from crown to base and dazzling in the

clear morning air the church seemed portly and pleasant as a prosperous gentleman. "Beautiful, beautiful Venice!" breathed Bonamy reclining in his place and waving a greeting to the comely building on his right. "O Venezia!"

"It is all very beautiful," said Miss Lindley looking about her with an air of inquiry; "but I do wish that a little more attention was paid to cleanliness, don't you Mr Playdell?"

"Beautiful in decay," murmured Bonamy, "O Venezia!"

"And bread? Do you find that you get good bread? You remember the bread which was made at home, don't you Mr Playdell?"

"How could I forget it? Those were happy days; but they are gone. And yet there is a charm in Venice, and in the present." Miss Lindley dropped her eyes. "Nature and art!" he added with a comprehensive wave of his hand. "Titian is with us here."

"I have been always very fond of the beauties of nature and of art," said the lady sympathetically.

"You are a votary of art yourself," returned the gentleman with ready gallantry.

"Oh, Mr Playdell, you must not flatter my poor efforts. Do you remember what a beautiful artist

Miss Smiley was? I am sure you remember Caroline Smiley, the daughter of our clergyman at home. I often think that I never saw anything so exquisite as her painting on fans."

"I remember Carry Smiley," said Mr Playdell with a keener interest in his voice; "of course I do. Let me see. She was the girl whom young Harry Saunders—yes of course—I remember all about it. Do tell me what has become of her. I remember——" And the little gentleman sat up, leaned forward, and slid happily into the old gossip of Limeshire. During a pause in his reminiscences his roving eye happened to light on Lady Lappin's gondola which was slowly gaining upon them. "By the by," he said, "what does our friend the Contessa mean by making such desperate love to that boy Freddy?"

Miss Lindley was a little shocked by the strength of the expression. "It is a great pity for poor young Lord Cheeppyre," she said; "he ought to be elsewhere."

"Rather a disappointment for our friend Deane, eh?"

"Poor Sara told me that Lady Cheeppyre had always intended the marriage to take place;" and she sighed sympathetically.

"Oh, well," said Bonamy with benevolence, "we all know the Belrotoli. It comes to nothing. It all ends in smoke and one or two little presents."

"I never can understand," said Miss Lindley with unwonted severity, "how the Count can permit his wife to receive so many presents from gentlemen."

"Belrotoli is a very clever fellow," said Mr Playdell restraining an inclination to wink; "and so is his wife. Halloo! they are gaining on us. Presto! Presto! We will not be caught."

The boatmen grinned and bent to their work. The fellow in the rear being full of energy and perhaps of mischief turned his oar at the end of every stroke somewhat more forcibly than was necessary, and at each turn Bonamy lounging gracefully in his place was tilted slightly towards his fair companion. Yet he remained unruffled, and beamed upon her at each tilt with a kindness which caused a feeble flutter of the lady's heart. On the track of this gentle pair came swiftly the darkling spirit of the Contessa Belrotoli. She was in great force, intoxicated by a new experience of mankind. Sometimes in moments of excessive bitterness she had cried that all men were alike; but after such periods of depression she rose again



to the study of the sex with renewed zeal. Nor did she limit herself to observation. With ever fresh delight she made experiments on masculine susceptibilities. Much evil had been spoken of the Belrotoli, but principally by those who had little sympathy with the scientific spirit. "He is wonderful," the Contessa had exclaimed to Lady Lappin after her first interview with Lord Chee-pyre. "I have been ever charmed by your little English grooms—the tigers as you say—so neat of form, so round-faced, so natty, with enchanting boots. Now comes one with all that charm—and also he is a gentleman." She was delighted by his strange expressions and his knowing air. She plied him with questions as he sat at her feet beneath the black canopy, and she turned again and again for sympathy to the lady at her side, who was in her most statuesque mood.

"You are fond then of the chase, of hunting? Is it good fun?" she asked.

"Ripping!" replied the youth.

"Ripping! You must teach me this argot. Ripping! I should love the hunt; how I should love it! The quickness, the excitement, the danger! Houpla, tantivy!" and her eye blazed with enthusiasm. "There is danger, is there not?"

"For them as like it. I've no nerve myself. I daren't jump a stick."

The Contessa twisted herself round to Lady Lappin in an ecstasy of delight. "Is he not wonderful?" she cried; and then to him, "You do better at gunning perhaps?"

"Yes, I gun," said Cheezyre without a smile, and slowly fixing a glass in his eye the better to contemplate this remarkable woman. If he had not long ago decided that nothing in life could surprise him, he would have been astonished by this lady. As it was, he accepted her as a fact which it was useless to discuss, and accepted her attentions as agreeable and flattering. "I gun," he repeated, "very nicely; but I don't hit anything. I'm too shaky."

"And you keep guns and horses and packs of dogs and grooms and hunters and all such things?"

"Not exactly," answered he; "I only wish I did. You see, my mother's got most of the ready."

"I am sure," said Lady Lappin who had preserved a grand silence, and breathed deeply that atmosphere of aristocracy which she believed to be her native air; "I am sure that Lady Cheezyre is most generous."

"She parts freely," said the lady's son. "I don't complain. I have lots of sport; and I humour her now and then."

"That is why you are here," cried the Belrotoli darting forward suddenly upon him; "to humour your mother. Is it not so?"

"Very likely," said the youth drily; then he threw away his cigarette and laughed. "Wouldn't she get up and snort if she could see me now," he said.

"Why?" asked the Contessa.

He looked at her comically. "That's a secret," he said.

"Provoking boy!" she cried; then turning to Lady Lappin she continued quickly, "Is he not wonderful this boy? So young and so clever! And he boasts himself stupid and coward! He boasts cowardice! I have known many Englishmen in former days, good fellows, swells, and they were all a little braggart. But this one! This one is a braggart upside down."

Lady Lappin looked at the young man as if to deprecate the anger of the British aristocracy and to explain this Italian frankness; but Lord Chee-pyre only chuckled with manifest enjoyment. At this the Contessa flashed round upon him again

with a question. "And you are happy? you enjoy life?"

"You bet," said the youth; he had a discriminating taste for Americanisms.

"Ah! you are droll Federico—I must call you Federico; I am old—old as the world, and may do as I like; you shall teach me your delightful talk, your 'ripping' and 'you bet.' But look! We are close to my Bonamy. Quick, quick, Paolino! Pieruccio! A race! a race!" She leaned forward, and her dark eye gleamed with excitement. "We are like a snail," she cried fiercely. "Quicker! quicker!" So she flew forward on the track of Mr Playdell, who was gaining rapidly on Sir Rupert; and so with unusual celerity all three boats arrived at the Lido, which was most delightful on that day.

It is strange that a great sandy bar—a mere outwork of Venice—should be so pleasant; but the dancing waves of the Adriatic run to it and break into laughter, and the breeze comes cheery and debonair as a courtier of Elizabeth. When the ancient city grows somewhat hot and the air seems stagnant, there is life and health on the protecting Lido.

In the gallery above the sea the Contessa threw aside her plumed hat with the careless motion of a

girl. Lady Lappin would have been glad to follow her example, but she had donned that morning for the first time a quasi-classical headpiece of a severe simplicity and of her own design. This headpiece and the novel arrangement of her hair, which she had copied from the bust of a Roman empress, may have partly caused that air of solemn repose, which she herself would have ascribed to a mood of artistic conception and a general sympathy with the spirit of the antique.

The whole party were gathered in the open gallery of the Casino, and there luncheon was prepared for them under the wandering eye and with the spasmodic assistance of Sir Rupert Lappin. Never was the Belrotoli more brilliant. The gaiety of her heart was like the sparkling light on the waves; and her kindness to the young Englishman was doubled under the eye of Tiribomba, who seemed cold and hard as his own glasses.

The bathing season had but lately begun; and there was light and animation on the strip of sand beneath the party who sat at luncheon under the wide awning. At a little distance some men were entering the water clad in light striped stuff and with broad straw hats to shield them from the sun.

"It is almost Greek," said Lady Lappin, who was sitting back from the table with her right elbow in the hollow of her left hand and a fat fore-finger indenting her cheek. "Yes. It is a Greek sea."

"Say rather Venetian," cried Mr Bonamy Playdell throwing back his coat and as it were baring his waistcoat to the breeze; "bountifully brilliantly Venetian. I love to think of the Adriatic as the doge's bride—as the bride of Marino Faliero." He threw up his chin, and played with the ring upon his finger.

"Pooh! pooh!" said the Belrotoli sharply, "she is too beautiful for the bride of an old magistrate. Federico, you will give me a cigarette?"

An awkward silence fell upon the party. Certainly the Contessa treated the English peer with a familiarity of very sudden growth. She was talking rapidly to him in an undertone, as she selected a cigarette from his case. Miss Lindley looked at Mr Playdell with an expression of acute distress, which suggested to him once more the peculiar beauty of refinement in woman. He remembered the rare atmosphere of the Lindley house of old, and was full of pity for this sole remnant—this lady left desolate. He thought that

he would write to Lady Chee-pyre, if interference in these matters were not universally condemned by men of the world. Even in Lady Lappin the insular or Clapham Common prejudices, which were for the most part dormant, asserted themselves more strongly every moment; and Sir Rupert observing signs of disgust in the one being whose strength he trusted looked as if he were listening to the first threats of an earthquake. The solid balcony trembled beneath his feet. Tiribomba alone preserved an appearance of unruffled calm. As the sea-bird darting on the troubled waters, the Contessa delighted in an atmosphere charged with electricity. She distributed shocks to all about her, and enjoyed the thrill of her own fear. She called on Lord Chee-pyre to drink toasts in the English fashion. She rallied Mr Playdell and overwhelmed Miss Lindley with confusion. She was full of wit and fury tossing away one cigarette after another as it checked the flow of her speech. "Another, Federico!" she demanded.

"You'd better keep the case," said the youth with the driest humour.

"A thousand thanks, my little prince," said she as she popped it into her pocket; "is he not

a prince for generosity? I have a passion for silver."

Cheepyre laughed with genuine admiration, and felt with pleasure that he was indeed seeing life. The ladies exchanged glances, and Tiribomba standing silent ground his iron-shod heel into the stone floor.

"Ugh!" cried the Contessa springing up at the sound with her teeth clenched, "I feel a chill; let us go. Quick! The place is a desert; horrible, horrible. Come, all of you! Quick, quick! let us go."



## CHAPTER XII.

"She is cunning past man's thought."

"Alack sir, no; her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love."

IF Mr Deane was a little shocked by the sudden appearance of young Lord Chee pyre, he was rendered no more amiable by the prolonged absence which followed. Hugo found himself neglected. Day after day he looked for the coming of the youth; evening after evening descended on the dreaming isle but the wooer came not to woo. Instead of him came rumours more or less disquieting to the sensitive mind. The boy was making a fool of himself, or being made a fool of. All his worldly wisdom had not rendered him proof against ingenious flattery; and the Contessa Belrotoli was absolutely alone in the power of injecting flattery into the male sex. She fed vanity with an infinite variety of sweetmeats. "She is a Semiramis," Mr

Playdell had said in a moment of inspiration ; and indeed she played with the innocent knowing lad as a cat with a mouse. In this game there is no possibility of danger to the cat. Under these distressing circumstances Hugo Deane remained in his tent like Achilles, and draped himself in a becoming pride.

"It is not for me to move in the matter," he said to his wife as he had said to her many times before.

"Certainly not, dear," answered she looking anxiously from the window.

Her husband detected the absent tone in her voice, and pushed his papers impatiently. Just at this time it was particularly provoking that Mrs Deane had no thought except for their little boy. It was so unreasonable, so like a woman, to make a fuss about a child who was a little under the weather.

And Cynthia also among many thoughts had time to wonder that the playmate of her childhood should be in Venice and not come daily to see her. Her father's delicacy made him shrink from speaking on the subject in her presence, and a strange uneasy feeling hindered her from expressing her surprise. So, as she had often done in life, she wondered and waited, until more knowledge came to her. This time she had not long to wait ; in-

formation came to her from an unlikely source. It was brought by Miss Lindley who was wafted over to the island on a visit of friendly inspection. It is certain that she came with kind intentions, and equally certain that she would have been shocked by the suggestion that she came to see how the poor Deanes bore their disappointment. Now when she arrived, it happened that Mrs Deane was busy for the moment in concocting something for her little Fabian's benefit, and that Hugo her lord had expressed a wish that he might not be disturbed for another half-hour. Such wishes of a man engaged in a work of the utmost importance are of course equivalent to imperial commands; and it was a matter of course to Cynthia that she should take upon herself the duty of entertaining Miss Lindley during that momentous half-hour. They had visited the cows and the favourite view, before the visitor discovered after some artless remarks and questions that her young guide was wholly ignorant of the cause of Lord Cheepry's absence. Then an unwonted glow passed through the somewhat chilly frame of the maiden lady. It was a great thing to be the first informant; and yet she could not decide if she should speak or no. But after some tremulous steps forward and some equally

tremulous backward, after several nods and becks, a parcel of dark sayings, and a prevailing air of "We could, an if we would," she found on a sudden that, so to speak, the cat was out of the bag.

Cynthia was looking at her with amazement. The girl had no conception of the wickedness of her sex. She had always felt a vague distrust of the Italian woman; but the idea that she a married woman could deliberately plot to gain the attentions of a man much younger than herself jarred her with sudden pain. She had touched pitch and there was a smudge on her spotless gown. "Is she so wicked? Is she a wicked woman?" she asked with a look of horror in her face.

To Miss Lindley such plain speaking seemed almost unmaidenly. "Oh my dear child," she said, "you must not say such dreadful things." She dropped her eyes as she added with slight hesitation, "Mr Playdell knows the world and everything so well, and he says that there is no harm, really no harm at all in the Contessa; only she is not nice according to our English ideas—not quite nice."

It is to be feared that Cynthia was not giving close attention to these delicate discriminations. She was looking far away with her head in the

air. "It is horrible," she said shortly. When she thought of the Belrotoli she felt as if she were looking at a spider; she always shuddered in the presence of a spider. Then she began to consider if she could help the blundering fly, if she could do anything for her old friend and playmate. "Poor Freddie!" she said with tears in her eyes, "he always was in scrapes."

"You must not fret about it, dear," said Miss Lindley with real pity in heart and voice.

"Why should I fret?" asked the girl; but the elder woman thought none the less that here was a real and very natural disappointment. It was impossible for Cynthia to help Cheeptyre unless she saw him, and as he would not come to her she was glad of an opportunity of going to him. She seized the first opportunity. "Oh yes, papa, do let us go," she said.

Mr Deane was a little offended by his daughter's eagerness. He held in his hand a very flattering note from Lady Lappin who besought him to come to dinner. He never refused to dine with the Lappins; and yet he looked at Cynthia a little doubtfully.

"Don't let us go if you would rather not," she said; "I only thought that we might see Freddie."

"Really my dear Cynthia, since the young man shows no anxiety for our society—— But no matter. I shall certainly not allow my actions to be influenced by any consideration of young Chee pyre. I shall do just as usual. I shall accept and I shall take you. Sara declares that she must stay with Fabian, and so of course she will stay. I must learn to do without her help."

"Oh padre, I think that she would cut herself in two if she could."

"I do not demand such a sacrifice," said Mr Deane with a wintry smile.

Meanwhile there was commotion in the Palazzo Belrotoli. It had seemed to Lady Lappin, and to Sir Rupert also, that something should be done for Lord Chee pyre. It may have been some remnant of insular prejudice which suggested a special show of honour to this youthful representative of the British aristocracy: perhaps it was due to the persistence of insular habit that the demonstration took the form of a dinner. Yet it was not to be as other dinners. Luxury was to be united with ease, London with Venice. Rich informal artistic it was limited to a few intimate friends and exclusively English. In pursuance of this design the preparations were carried on with extraordinary

secrecy. Who can tell how these things are known? Perhaps Sir Rupert's secrecy was excessive, and the air of mystery and the going about on tiptoe betrayed the conspiracy. Perhaps the cook was carried away from her accustomed reserve by anticipations of triumph. Perhaps the thin Italian nose perceived unusual flavours on the palace stairs. Certain it is that on the very afternoon preceding the banquet the Contessa Belrotoli descended upon the apartments of her dear Lappin. She was cut to the soul by the discovery that her Brigida was gathering her friends, and that she was not among them. In vain Lady Lappin explained her reasons.

"And am I not English too?" cried the Countess in obedience to a heroic impulse. "I who am English to the back? And you make a festival without me! I love England—all English things—your people, your hunt, your dinners, your turtle in tins, and you do not join me to your festal day! But I shall come; I shall come to show honour to my dear England and my Federico, whom I love also."

After this no more could be said; and the Belrotoli clad in a lustrous sheeny gown and gleaming with the family emeralds occupied a place of hon-

our on the right hand of Sir Rupert Lappin, whose comfort was not increased by her proximity. The little gentleman was manifestly uneasy. He smiled tremulously at his neighbour; his gentle eyes looked pathetic apologies at Hugo Deane, who regarded him with chilling disapproval. Moreover he was accustomed at dinner-parties to assume the white choker and orthodox swallow-tail; and he was rendered exquisitely uncomfortable by the loose coat of sage-green velvet and the turned-down collars, which seemed good in the eyes of his wife as a symptom of abandonment to Bohemian comfort.

Sir Rupert made tremendous efforts to abandon himself. "No formality," he muttered nodding his head up and down to the Belrotoli, "no formality!"

"It is delicious," answered she; but whether she referred to the absence of ceremony or to the turtle, which had duly arrived in its tin, will always remain an open question. Italy and England joined hands over that dinner-table. The turtle from the city gave way to a fry of little fish from the Mediterranean, a leg of mutton from the Welsh mountains was balanced by a wild pig killed on royal land and served with prune sauce. The plenty of the



mansion-house was blended with imperial luxury and chastened by artistic taste. Under the softened light of many candles the wine of Epernay sparkled in Venetian glasses. Between two silver baskets from the Strand stood a cup, gold, with two handles—a cup but lately dug out of the soil of Greece. Everywhere were red roses which had come post-haste from Nice. The *Vino d'Asti* stood by the champagne, Bordeaux by Chianti, white Capri from the South, Johannisberg from the Rhine, and one bottle of the peculiar old port of the late Alderman Hodge. So they sat on seats of deep-toned Genoa velvet, and enjoyed the good things of the world. How the Contessa enjoyed them. "One must have the best," as she often said. Her eye flashed round the table more bright than the family jewels. She was brilliant incomprehensible fascinating.

"A thundering neat woman!" whispered Lord Chee-pyre to his hostess.

"It is of this that I have dreamed," murmured the Belrotoli to her host.

"No formality, you know; no formality," muttered Sir Rupert. So saying he assumed an attitude of apparent ease. At the same time his wife rose with an abstracted air and passed slowly

through the half-drawn heavy curtains, which separated the scene of revel from the studio sacred to art. After the Welsh mutton there was to be an informal pause in the dinner. Mr Playdell, who liked to assist digestive powers which needed no assistance, also left the table. Then Hugo Deane, who was irritated by young Cheepry's invincible calm, pushed back his chair and followed Lady Lappin into the studio. He found her motionless and standing like a muse amid the creations of her genius. The large room was brilliantly lighted. The walls were hung with Venetian tapestries. Stuffs all crimson and gold but softened by the tender touch of age were flung on the low couches. On one side a wide table was covered with notes note-books and MSS. On the other was an easel, which bore a picture half done and painted in sad colours. White and sparkling in the broad light was an Eros roughly hewn out in marble.

"Is he not Hellenic?" asked the lady not moving nor looking round.

"You have good workmen?" asked Hugo with polite interest. He could not forgive his hostess for admitting the Belrotoli to that dinner.

"Yes," answered the most amiable lady, "my

workmen are wonderful. They adore me. They are my hands, I tell them. The creative power is here." She pressed her fat white hands to her temples and raised her eyes to the lofty ceiling.

"Signora, the birds!" cried an Italian servant bursting through the curtains with a warm interest in the success of the entertainment.

His mistress smiled upon him. "Happy children of the South!" she said with a sweet smile to Hugo Deane, and she swept softly back to her place at the table. She loved an interval for musing among her works, but she never missed a dish. The room was full of the babble of voices. Bonamy had resumed his seat with renewed ardour, and was accompanying one of his choicest stories with illustrative flourishes of his knife and fork. Miss Lindley's eyes were bright with pleasure. The Contessa was prattling like a child to the bubbles rising in her glass. Lord Cheepyre who had mixed his wines freely was describing a run, in which but for finking the first jump, as he was very careful to explain, he would have occupied a prominent position.

In the midst of all this noise Stephen Aylward sat looking at his cousin Cynthia and smiling as he thought how puzzled she must be by these

eccentric persons. She was, he said to himself, so delightfully incapable of understanding all that was going on about her. He thought of Philip Lamond's infatuation and nearly burst out laughing. Cynthia was like the lady amid the rabble rout of Comus. When she first entered the room she felt a thrill of pleasure. The blended colours and the light of many candles made her step more quick and her smile more frequent. She opened like a bud in the perfumed air. But as the banquet went slowly on and the talk grew louder, she began to shrink back into herself. There was something in the mirth which chilled her, and when the roving eye of the Belrotoli lighted on her for a moment, she shivered. At last she began to struggle with a horrible suspicion that Freddie was taking too much wine. His conversation flowed with unusual fulness, and he became more knowing every moment. He was ready to provide the whole party with "tips" for avoiding all troubles and dangers, and he illustrated every conceivable weakness by the frankest reference to himself. As Cynthia was watching this honest youth with increasing alarm, she caught Stephen's eye fixed upon her with an expression of amusement, and thereat she felt an unusual flash

of anger. Why could not Stephen do something to help her poor friend, instead of amusing himself with his wearisome mockery? She was much relieved when they left the table; but unhappily it was merely another Bohemian pause—an absence of a few minutes. Back they all came from the studio, and found the table covered with hothouse fruit from France and a fresh mass of roses. The servants had departed, and there was no longer a check on the guests' enjoyment. Back came the Belrotoli, flushed through powder, undulating in her walk and turning her head from side to side.

"I swear I heard her hiss," whispered Stephen to Bonamy who was radiant and light of foot as a young faun.

"You are sad my Lord Cheeptyre," cried the Contessa to that young gentleman, who with an air of portentous gravity was explaining to Lady Lappin the best position for sleeping in a railway carriage. "Look!" she went on, "I am in an empress mood to-night. I have not a pearl, but if I had one I would melt him in this wine and drink to England and Federico. It is in the honour of Federico this festival. Let us have a toast. What do you say, Sportsman?" She pointed a long finger at Mr Playdell, and laughed with

glee at her newly acquired expression. Recollections of Clapham Common were crowding thick on Lady Lappin. Sir Rupert with anxiety in his voice was still proclaiming the informality of the party. Miss Lindley slipped away tremulous, though unobserved, and scarcely dared to breathe until she was safe in her gondola.

"Come away," said Hugo shortly to his daughter. He was disgusted by this riot, and ready to wash his hands of the whole party. It would ill become him to make any further overtures to the misguided Chee pyre. As he moved away, Cynthia seized her opportunity.

"Freddie," she said quickly, "you will come to us to-morrow? Promise me."

"No, no," said Chee pyre with his wisest air, "you don't catch me binding myself." His voice was loud if his words were none of the clearest.

Stephen Aylward stared at his cousin in amazement, and the Belrotoli laughed shrilly. She had been busy with her long fingers winding roses into a wreath. "Come," she cried, "down on to your knees Federico! Quick, quick! I will crown you."

Cynthia turned away with a shudder. As she turned she saw Aylward looking curiously at her. She put out her hand towards him. "O Stephen,"

she said, "how can you allow this?" There was a tone of passionate rebuke in her voice.

Stephen looked after her with a puzzled expression. "Poor Philip!" he said with a little toss of the head. He thought that this girl was strangely incapable of hiding her feelings, that her readiness to be on with the new love was clear as the day.

Cheepyre stood staring after the girl, and his flushed boyish face was eloquent of gratified vanity. He was recalled from this fit of contemplation by the voice of the Belrotoli. She was more shrill, more imperious, and she tapped the ground with her little foot. "Down on your knees!" she cried; and she pressed her long fingers upon his shoulder. Down went the youth with an empty laugh; and the lady raised the rose-wreath high in air before placing it on his curly head. The room seemed heavy with the scent of flowers and wine, full of swimming light. Suddenly the great curtains swayed out and in, there was a quick cool motion of the outer air, the door had been opened wide, and in the doorway stood motionless the Captain Tiribomba. Opposite him, and motionless as he, stood the Contessa Belrotoli with the flowers held high, with eyes and emeralds gleaming. The eyes were fastened on Tiribomba and the lips grew thin with mocking,

as the lithe hands slowly sank and placed the garland on the head of the kneeling youth.

"Pardon me," said the Captain to Lady Lappin, "I did not know that you entertained. Permit me to make you my congratulations on your tableaux. A thousand thanks, no. I am not able to stay." With a bow, which acknowledged the presence of the whole party, he turned sharply on his heel, as Sir Rupert sidled up with hesitating action to explain the informality of the occasion. The little gentleman looked round with mild distress; and the Belrotoli white to the lips burst into a passion of metallic laughter.



## CHAPTER XIII.

"For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring."

THE weather had become suddenly hot. The pleasant airs of spring were gone, and Venice breathed only languor and expectation. Men lounging on the little bridges looked up and wondered when the storm would come, but still the storm delayed. The canals seemed dull and sluggish, and the water hummed drowsily against the high blank walls. Stephen Aylward felt the pervading torpor in his blood, and was hopeless of that mood of artistic calm, which half-cynically he accepted as his ideal. He could not work and did not care to play. Having nothing to do he began to think that he might make himself useful—that he might as well keep an eye on young Chee pyre, and prevent him as far as might be from being made a fool of. He could not forget Cynthia's passionate appeal to him. He was

irritated by its frequent recurrence. In vain he told himself that it was none of his business, that he was not his brother's keeper, that Cheeppyre was not his brother. He tried to laugh at his lazy cousin's sudden awakening, but it was too hot for laughter. "Give a girl one lover," he said with weary irony, "and she looks out for a score. Give her two, and it is ten to one that she prefers the fellow who runs after somebody else." In such terms he argued with himself; and would then try to turn his attention to composition but in vain. He had conclusive reasons for doing nothing in this matter of Lord Cheeppyre. If the Contessa enslaved the youth, no harm would be done except to his pocket, and Philip Lamond would be rid of a rival. If the Deane family succeeded in winning their little lord from the expensive influence of the Italian woman, so much the better for master Freddie, and Philip was well rid of a minx. The arguments in favour of Stephen Aylward's remaining an amused spectator of the comedy were unanswerable. But unluckily the amusement was absent. In its place was an unusual irritability due as he said to the electrical state of the atmosphere, and a haunting recurrence of the girl's irrational appeal. So Stephen with a shrug confessed himself a fool, and for two dull

slumbrous days favoured Lord Cheeptyre with a great deal of his company. He indulged in occasional sarcasm, which was not understood, and awaited an opportunity of admonition. He found it easy to wait, and thought that, if the storm would only come, he would find the energy necessary for exhortation. On the afternoon of the second day he was lazily looking about for his charge, and refreshing his troubled spirit with a vision of driving rain which would set the dull waters hissing, when he felt a hand on his shoulder and turning a lack-lustre eye found that the object of his search had come to him. Cheeptyre was in unusual spirits. "Come along with me," he cried heartily, "and dine at the Florian. Don't say no."

"I wasn't going to," answered Stephen.

"Then step out my bloomer," said the other with easy familiarity.

The weather had no depressing effect on Lord Cheeptyre. He tilted his hat over one eye; he chuckled to himself; he moved as one who knew the world. The great Piazza seemed too small for him and his knowledge of life. "It's uncommon hot," he said; "champagne and lots of ice." He addressed the waiters with easy pleasantry; he was

garrulous and a little noisy, and wholly unconscious of his guest's silence.

The Caffè was hot ; and when at the end of dinner Stephen stepped out into the Piazza he found that the evening had brought no freshness. "I've a leaden weight on my head," he said wearily.

"You didn't drink enough," said Cheebye gaily. "Holloa ! here's the band. Strike up my sportsmen !" and he began to sing a hunting song. "I can't catch it : what's the blooming note ?"

"Hush !" said Stephen anxiously.

"Stunning place this Venice !" burst forth Lord Cheebye presently, as he hung on his friend's arm.

"So I have heard," answered Stephen soothingly.

"Thundering jolly place, ripping place Venice ! I don't mean your pictures and all that. What's the good of pictures ? Give me originals."

Stephen Aylward began to think that his charge had drunk too much. There was certainly something curious in his pronunciation of the word "originals." "Come to my rooms," he suggested.

"Certainly not," said Cheebye with excessive solemnity. "I am going to make a visit—charming woman—I'll take you—any friend of mine—I don't care what you do—you may go to the devil

—I am going to make a visit to the little Countess Belrotoli."

As he was speaking the band stopped playing; and his last words which were pitched in a high key rang with unfortunate sharpness above the murmur of voices. The people all about him looked and laughed. They were always ready to find infinite amusement in the eccentricities of travelling Englishmen. But there was one who was in no mood for laughter. At the sound of the lady's name so idly uttered an upright thin figure turned sharply; the end of his long military cloak fell from his left shoulder; and Stephen with a sensation of hopelessness saw the eyes of Tiribomba glare through his appalling glasses. The Captain came close and spoke low and rapidly with concentrated fury in his voice. Chee pyre listened to the flow of Italian with an exaggerated air of deference. "My sentiments exactly," he said with an empty laugh.

"I forgot you know nothing," said Tiribomba in English. "The Signor Aylward will tell my meaning. As for you, if you make more visits, I know how to speak to a young English dog." He hissed the words with extreme malignity, and Chee pyre started as if he had been struck. Then he turned

scarlet and was choked by the words which he wished to speak. The people around him were staring like children, and a woman tittered.

"Curse him! let me get at him," cried Chee-pyre struggling to free himself from Stephen's clutch. "I'll knock his head off. Let me go, let me go, I say."

Tiribomba had his hand upon his sword. Stephen clung desperately to his friend, who seemed to have gained a double portion of strength. The captive was almost free, when somebody pushing his way quickly through the crowd caught him by the other arm, and Stephen looking up to thank him for his help saw Philip Lamond.

Tiribomba bowed stiffly to the group before him. "I have given him his warning," he said; "let him have a care where he goes."

"Enough," said Philip shortly; and the Captain turning with a clank on the pavement strode off and was lost in the crowd.

"What shall we do with him?" asked Lamond.

"Get him out of this," said Stephen venting his disgust by giving a slight push to Chee-pyre, who had become strangely quiet. "We can put him in my spare room," he added, "and keep an eye on him."

"Bring him along," said Philip promptly; and they hustled him off without further words.

When the warlike youth had been safely tucked into bed and his light removed, the two friends had leisure to consider the situation, and each other. Stephen threw himself into a chair oppressed by the accumulation of embarrassments and the heat of the night. He glanced helplessly towards the open window against which his friend's large form showed tall and dark. After a pause full of uncomfortable thought Philip asked suddenly, "Who is he?" and nodded towards the bedroom door.

"Chee pyre," answered Stephen shortly.

"I thought so," said Philip, and there was another pause. At last he spoke again. "Why did he come here?" he asked.

"Why have you come?" asked Stephen in turn, and he went to him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Why did I come? Because I have worked too hard: because I needed rest and change: because I am not a stone. But don't bother about me. Tell me about this fellow, and why he is here."

He sat down quietly on the nearest chair, and listened without a word, while his friend told him how Lord Chee pyre had appeared in Venice, how

the Belrotoli had amused herself with weaving toils and inflaming the jealousy of the Captain.

"And the Deanes?" Philip asked shortly, when the story was done.

"Of course they are disgusted. They had sent for him I suppose; and when he came he would hardly go near them."

"And Cynthia?"

He spoke the name firmly, but he did not look up. He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, and his head propped on his two fists. Stephen Aylward with a great anxiety to be kind laid his hand again on his friend's shoulder. "You know you ought to think no more of this," he said.

"I know it. I came to see her if I could without being seen. I only want to know how she is. Is she well? Is she sad?"

"It is best that I should tell you the truth. She seems wonderfully well, and was in great spirits—until the other night. There was a dinner at the Lappins; and that Italian woman was more fiendish than usual; and Cynthia was more excited than I thought possible. She begged our friend there to come to the island. She turned on me almost fiercely because of his folly. You should have stayed away I think."



For a time Philip Lamond said nothing, but he put up a hand to the friendly hand on his shoulder. "It is best so perhaps," he said at last, and then after another pause he burst forth with his first show of excitement. "But if anything should happen to this boy! We must keep him safe. What's to be done about this clanking captain?"

He jumped up with a strange sense of relief at the thought of possible action, and began to stride about the room with his old air of impetuosity. Stephen shrugged his shoulders. "We must pack him off for a bit."

"But will he go? He seemed full of fight, and the fellow was infernally insolent."

"It was pot-valour," said Stephen with a slight movement of disgust; "Chee pyre is perfectly frank about his prowess."

"But 'little dog of an Englishman'! I don't like it. It's too strong."

"It is not agreeable. But there is nothing to be done. We must let it blow over. The Contessa knows when to stop. She has had her fun. She has been talked about: she has been the centre of two or three scenes. The Venetian gossips have a great liking for Tiribomba's respectful adoration; and she won't offend them. We must get the

youth out of the way, and let matters adjust themselves."

Philip striding about the room seemed to pay slight attention to the other's suggestions. "I don't like it," he repeated sharply: "I have a great mind to fight the fellow myself: he would be safe, safe for her; and I—what can it matter to me whether I live or die?"

## CHAPTER XIV.

"That dare as well answer a man indeed,  
As I dare take a serpent by the tongue :—"

STEPHEN AYLWARD could not sleep. His temples were throbbing and his mind distressingly active in one weary round. Again and again he went through the scene in the Great Piazza. He wondered if Philip were sleeping; if Cheepry would wake with a headache; what the Deanes would think of it all. At last he got out of bed and threw the window wide open. The night was intensely black, the air sullen and motionless as at noon. It was a labour to breathe. Stephen was turning away with a sigh, when he was conscious of a sudden light. He paused, and presently heard in the distance a noise of thunder. He turned quickly with a fresh sense of hope and joy; and on a sudden down came the rain,

bounteous and plentiful, driving dull vapours and lashing the still waters below. The young man laughed aloud and spread his arms wide to the quickening night. "All may yet be well," he said to his heart. Then he jumped into bed, and after a few moments was sleeping like a child. It was late when he woke, and he started to find Philip by his bedside.

"He has gone," said Philip.

"Gone!" echoed Stephen only half awake. "Who's gone where?"

"Cheepry is gone. I woke with a feeling that somebody had gone out through the room, and I went to look at him, and he had gone. I would not wake you; it was no use; and you needed sleep. I tried the station; then the Belrotoli Palace, and the Caffè Florian, and at last the Piazzetta. He went off at cock-crow in a gondola."

Aylward was wide awake now and much disgusted. "He has run away," he said.

"Not he," said Lamond; "Tiribomba was with him, and a young surgeon — nobody else. They have gone to fight."

"Impossible! I told you that he does not even pretend to any pluck."

"Impossible, but true. They went toward San Giovanni. Will you come?"

"But we must be too late. Poor boy! Young fool!"

"Jump up! there's no time to lose. I'll get you some breakfast."

Stephen jumped out of bed much refreshed by the great change in the atmosphere. A cool sweet air came to him as he hurriedly dressed himself, and he hoped that after all no harm would come of this absurd affair. As for Philip, the necessity of action roused him like wine. The thought that he might help this headstrong boy stirred to its depths that chivalry, which in the ordinary days of life he kept concealed. He busied himself in the room, and counted the lagging minutes. "For Cynthia!" he said to himself, and was ready for a thousand battles. If only he might be in time to take this quarrel on himself, and send the boy safe to her. Nothing should stay him—not Stephen, nor the whole Italian army. He was wild with impatience before Aylward joined him. He only gave him time to snatch a roll from the table, and was already hurrying him to the door, when it was thrust open, and old Rosa appeared with lively demonstrations of sorrow and alarm. Stephen's

heart sank; here was some new complication of affairs. It was clear that no festival or much loved holiday had brought old Rosa from her island. Here was genuine grief dramatically displayed. She burst into lamentations over the poor little woman.

"Cynthia?" gasped Philip, and turned white. "Is the young lady ill?" asked Stephen in Italian.

"No, no," she answered; "the poor lady the mother, and she so good, so gentle! It is a stupidity of the blessed saints,—a stupidity!" Then she went on with many gesticulations and much breaking off for appropriate exclamation to relate how master Fabian had slipped away from the lazy Vittoria at the first dawn and run out into the grass all drenched with the thunder-shower; how the Signora had instantly discovered it, and gone in pursuit; how she the poor old woman Rosa coming from an early visit to her cows had found the mother and son together. Then with the tears streaming down her withered shrunken cheeks she said that the good lady had called her, and begged her to take the boy quickly to the house and to change his little shoes. "And the poor thing cried, 'Quick, quick, my good Rosa!' and pushed the dear little rascal to me, and at that moment she turned white—white as your linen my young

gentleman, and fell down there where she stood on the wet grass. Holy Madonna, how I have moved my old legs to bring the news; and I was a noted dancer once, let the young gentlemen believe me!" And she began to point her old toes, and to grin though the tears were not dry on her cheeks.

"And the master, Mr Deane, how is he?" asked Stephen, who shocked as he was had room for the thought how strange it was that such a lover of peace as he should be hurried hither and thither by other people's business.

"Ah, the poor little one!" cried Rosa relapsing into the depths of woe, "what can you expect? He is a man—a poor thing when trouble comes. He has fallen flat. He sits and stares so, so, till the eyes drop out of his head."

Stephen looked rather hopelessly at the old woman's expressive pantomime, but Philip broke in quickly: "And the young lady?"

"How brave she is, the young lady!" cried Rosa rapturously. "She has put the poor mother to bed, and she said to me, 'My Rosa'—for she knows well that I have sense if I am an old woman, more sense than these young girls like that lazy Milanese slut Vittoria—'Rosa,' she said, 'go quickly, quickly and bring the doctor——'"

"And the doctor? You have been to him? Where is he?"

"Where should he be? He waits for the other young gentleman, Mr Stephen, on the Piazzetta."

"He is waiting? Why did not you say so? Stephen, you must go to them at once. I will go to the boy, and do everything. Don't say anything about it to them. They have enough to worry them. Leave everything to me. And Stephen—be gentle to her." He wrung his friend's hand and was half-way down-stairs before Aylward could promise.

"Come," said Stephen, and he went out with the old woman chattering at his heels.



## CHAPTER XV.

"Pistol him, pistol him !

"Peace, peace !"

FAR off on the wide lagoon an old monastery stands and blinks in the sunlight with half-shaded windows. About it is a single meadow almost level with the level waters save where on its weakest side a long low bank is raised against the encroaching sea. About it too is a strange atmosphere of peace, of indifference to the restless world, of loneliness and silence. And indeed the brethren dwelling and dreaming there keep silence for the most part even from good words, and seem content. They do not care to dig, but leave the wild flowers to peep among the thick green grass. And indeed the island needs no culture, but is majestic enough with its one group of ancient cypresses, whose trunks are tall and straight and bare until high

up their thick green crowns are dark against the perfect blue. It is hard to believe that the old wall was ever built, for it seems to have grown there with its own ivy. Above the ancient porch these words are written: "O Solitudo, sola Beatitudo."

On every side of the low-lying island-meadow is shallow water, but here and there the placid surface is broken by strips and patches of dark level earth. Out on these misty flats one early morning the report of two pistols fired together rang sharp and clear, breaking the slumbrous charm of the place with sharp indubitable message from the outer world, fluttering the monastic doves, frightening the isle from its imperturbable propriety. Many brethren came hastily flocking together and staring with eyes opened unusually wide. They could with difficulty distinguish certain dark figures on a low bank towards the east. Presently a gondola put off and came quickly towards them urged at full speed; and before they could consult together or even guess at this strange thing which was to be, there on the turf at their feet was laid a wounded boy.

The tall man wrapped in a military cloak saluted them respectfully, and turned away to bend again over the still form of his young enemy, while the

doctor briefly demanded shelter for his charge. "Give him repose and quiet," he said, "and I will do the rest." Then he touched the kneeling captain on the shoulder and pointed to the boat. "You must go at once," he said. "You shall hear; I will write; all will go well."

Tiribomba was still staring at the boy. "He is too young," he said in a strange tone. "I did not know; I did not think;" and he stepped into the gondola without another word.

The monks were lost in astonishment, for not within the memory of the oldest among them had so strange a thing happened in that place. Nevertheless under the direction of the young doctor they accepted their burden very gently, bore him under the old inscription, and laid him in a narrow bed. Nor were the astounding events of the day yet ended; for presently came another young Englishman demanding admission making passionate inquiries. He would not be denied, but almost forced an entrance: he would not be thrust out, but established himself firmly as nurse. So after some further fluttering the brethren accepted the inevitable, and slowly settled down to their accustomed peace. Suns rose and set; mists melted in the light; solitary men passed and repassed; and young

Lord Cheepry still lay in the little bed, high up in the narrow bare room.

Philip Lamond was growing accustomed to this unusual life, and was rather proud of his improvement as nurse under the doctor's tuition. He had given himself wholly to the one purpose of restoring the luckless Freddie safe and sound to his friends—to her who would be his best friend. For amusement he walked forth alone measuring the island-meadow with slow feet; standing to gaze now at the dark cypress-tops, now far away to the opaline still distance where Venice veiled herself; murmuring half a hundred times a day, "O Solitudo, sola Beatitudo."

One day he sat staring from Cheepry's window, quietly congratulating himself for he had discerned a decided improvement in his charge. Heretofore the wounded hero had been too weak and listless to do more than live, and had accepted help and care with only a faint wish to be let alone. But to-day there was a real change for the better, and therewith a tendency to loquacity. Lying in bed with his curly hair in disorder and his complexion delicate as a girl's he looked very unlike the man of the world. Letting a little blood had let out a wonderful amount of knowingness. Further dissimulation was impossible. He was frankly,

almost absurdly a boy. After several snubs and commands to keep quiet he lay still for some minutes staring at his attendant, and then asked suddenly, "Who the deuce *are* you?"

The question took Mr Lamond by surprise. He had never thought of introducing himself. "I am Philip Lamond," he said; "a friend of Stephen Aylward. I came after you—on a wild-goose chase I may say, and here I am likely to remain, unless you keep quiet and concentrate your energies on getting stronger."

After this there was a short period of silence, and then Cheepry yielded to his reawakened curiosity, and said, "Tell me all about it; and I will keep quiet. Where did you find me? What was I doing? Where is he, the Captain?" and he made a comical movement of his bandaged arm.

"I found you here, and you were far from well. A young Venetian doctor was searching in your shoulder for a ball of which you are now well rid; and now keep quiet and don't ask any more questions."

"And that infernal Captain?" asked the other quickly.

"Captain Tiribomba," replied Philip, "is on his way to Central Africa, where he may indulge in

more pistol practice. He behaved as well as could be expected. That cold-blooded young saw-bones assured me that he refused to go until he was sure that you were in no danger ; and he left a note for Milord Chee pyre, which I will give you, if you don't speak again for twenty-four hours."

"But——"

"Now you shan't have it."

"But I shall be much better and quieter if you will read it to me. Do read it, there's a good fellow." He spoke with boyish eagerness ; and Philip, whose feeling towards the rash youth had grown kinder daily, sternly refused, and went to fetch the letter. It was short and formal. Though it was written in pencil, the characters were neatly and completely formed.

"MY LORD CHEE PYRE,—I am most truly regretful that you have an injury at my hands. I am glad to know that you will be well after a little time. I myself spoke with fury for which I am sorry ; but I never can allow the name of that lady to be said without the deepest respect. I go now to the middle of Africa.—Believe me, most esteemed lord, your servant,

"GIULIO TIRIBOMBA."

"He isn't half a bad sort," said the voice from the bed, and, for the boy was still very weak, tears filled his eyes as he spoke.

"It's lucky he did not kill you," said Philip sardonically: "a nice fellow you are to go fighting at your age."

Freddie laughed low, and caught at a chance of prattle. "He insulted my country, you know," he observed with some youthful pomposity.

"Little dog of an Englishman!" was Philip's brief comment.

"I was in the devil's own funk," continued the other; "but it wasn't half bad fun. I might never have had another chance of fighting a duel—and about a woman too." He laughed with frank enjoyment and with a boyish artlessness which charmed his attendant in spite of himself.

"You be still," he said gruffly as he smoothed his pillow, "and be thankful that you ain't dead."

The boy laughed again and hugged himself with a pleasant sense of growing life. He put one of his hands on Philip's and smiled to see how white and thin it looked against that big brown fist. "You ain't a bad fellow either," he said; "but why on earth are you so awfully good to me?"

"Snobbery I suppose," answered Philip looking down at him half grimly half kindly.

So the days went slowly by in the most quiet of sick-rooms—days all alike unclouded, spent by Lord Chee pyre in retarding his recovery by forbidden chatter, by Philip in his new duties his marching and countermarching his study of cy-presses. It was a quiet life. Even the doctor came less often and committed himself to more decided opinions. Now and then a letter was wafted over from Stephen Aylward, or a bundle of clothes physic or other necessary articles. The letters brought ever worse accounts of poor Mrs Deane. It was clear that she had been ill for a long time, that she must have guessed it and been wilfully blind for the sake of her husband and her boy. "Thus," wrote Stephen, "do women go astray to sacrifice themselves and injure their dearest thereby. Hugo Deane is prostrate. He has more feeling than I gave him credit for. Cynthia is calm of course but of more use than I expected." Philip brooded for hours over such passages as these; he repeated them to himself as he strode about the meadow, or punted himself over the shallow water and stared into the veiled distance, where lay that other and richer island far off and unattainable.



One evening Lord Cheepry rolled in a big dressing-gown sat by the open window of his room, and lazily wondered why he cared so much for such a tame thing as sunlight. Near to him was the one great stone-pine of the island growing old by the old stained wall, looking out westward, alone at its post with its wide-spreading crown of green enriched by a yellow glow as if it held captive a bountiful unending autumn. Down below the pine-tree the channel has been deepened, and here two brothers of the order in gowns of yellow-brown were pushing their boat and thinking of fish. Far and wide the level waters were stretched between the gazer and the west, and, as the sun moved down, they grew of a pale lemon colour, pure and fresh as the sky, so clear and calm that the shadow of the bending wader was distinct. Farther, far as if on the frontier of another world was a faint vision of exquisite low hills.

The boy felt the charm of the hour, as he had never felt such charm in his robust days. He had been silent for an unusually long time; and Philip Lamond who was leaning on the back of his chair started at the sound of his voice. "Look here," said Cheepry, "I've been thinking."

"And you were told not to fatigue yourself," said Philip drily.

"Don't play the goose Philip. I really want to talk to you seriously."

"I don't believe you can. Try if you like. I have nothing to do."

"You see Philip," Chee pyre began slowly and with some solemnity, "lying in bed all day I have had nothing to do but think, and I think I've been making a fool of myself."

"You think that, do you?" said Philip.

"And I've been thinking about that Italian woman," continued the boy with an ingenuous blush, "and the truth is, I couldn't stand seeing her again."

"Well," said Lamond, "I daresay she will survive that deprivation."

Chee pyre laughed a little, and then looking down and playing with the tassel of his dressing-gown he said, "And I've been thinking of somebody else—in fact of Cynthia. Do you know her? Of course you must have seen Cynthia—Miss Deane?"

Philip standing behind his friend did not move, until surprised at his silence Chee pyre turned himself half round in his chair and looked up with a slight effort.

"Yes," said Philip deliberately, "I know the Deanes."

A more sensitive youth might have detected a strange tone in Lamond's voice, an echo of past passion; but Freddie, who was intent on unburdening himself, went on heedlessly: "I was sent out here to make up to Cynthia. I always liked her awfully, and I didn't mind pleasing my mother, but somehow when I got here and felt that I ought to begin the business, I couldn't stand it. That's human nature you know." There was a fine air of wisdom about the boy which made his new friend burst into an unnatural fit of laughter.

"When you have quite done," said Freddie; and he presently resumed his confessions. "I've been tremendously weak, and when I'm weak I'm sentimental. If I shut my eyes, I keep on seeing that island and Cynthia going about so cool and calm and sweet. Do you know, I think I'm hit."

"Indeed," said Philip, and then after a moment's pause, "Why do you tell this to me? Can I help you?"

"Yes," said Freddie, "I want you to take me to the island. I'm quite strong enough now for the journey; and I shall get well there I know; and I can be looking about me, seeing how the land lies you know." The boy accompanied his last remark with a knowing look which spoke of returning health.

"And she?" asked Philip—"Miss Deane? Will she be glad to receive you?"

"I think so," said Lord Cheeppyre slowly and with a face full of innocent self-satisfaction.

Lamond turned sharply away and went towards the door, but as he reached it he turned with a face very grave and kind. "I can't take you myself," he said, "for I must get to work again, but I will send for Stephen; he will take you."

He stepped out without waiting for thanks and left Freddie to his simple day-dreams and unthinking contemplation of the brown bare-legged fishermen, who were wading not far off and stooping to the clear cool water. Philip passed away into the meadow, where the shadows of the tall cypresses lay long and black towards the East. "A pretty pair!" he muttered to himself, and the words were buzzing in his ears as he walked, and his footsteps beat them on the ground. "A pretty pair, a pretty pair!" He saw the sweet lawn by the tree which he loved so well, and the boy and girl lovers wandering, and the boy had the air of a hero and the girl was proud to support his steps. He saw the approving looks of the elders; and a cry broke from him at last, "Good God! It is such a capital arrangement from every point of view;" and so he

burst out laughing to the surprise of two silent brethren. They gazed at him with the calm eyes of cattle, mildly wondering, for they had heard somewhere that it took a great deal to make an Englishman laugh.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"I am Sir Oracle."

ALL Venice was full of the duel. Here indeed was something to talk about. A young English milordo had risked his life, and about a woman! But then as everybody knows these English will risk their lives for anything, for nothing. What would you have? They are mad, all mad—mad as Florentines. One might know well enough that the Capitano Giulio was a Florentine; for "the saints be praised," said fat Beppo, "Venetians do not fight except about a bargain, and that is an important matter. Well, let the Captain get back to Florence, and be thankful for his whole skin."

"But," Angeluccio answered, "he has gone to Africa, which they say is a long long way off—farther than Florence," and he raised his eyebrows and extended his arms to signify immensity.

Talk flowed through the little canals, and lingered by the bridges. Throughout the market and at every vegetable stall in every alley was babble of talk and comment. The simple folk had always felt a lively interest in the Belrotoli: now the interest was at fever heat. Angeluccio knew that the flowers had gone in to the Contessa as usual—those flowers which were paid for by “the little fat one.” It was by this unflattering title that they gravely designated Lady Lappin, whose name they put aside as impossible. Beppo had dropped in at the Palazzo to ask after the porter’s gout, but that surly old wretch would say nothing. But the most exciting piece of news was contributed by the barber’s cook who told her story again and again with much animation and many gestures. She said that her master had been admitted as usual to dress the hair of the Contessa, and had found her clad from head to foot in utter blackness with a black train which reached half-down the long saloon (“and one may imagine what that is,” cried Angeluccio round-eyed); that the lady had moreover declined the hairdresser’s assistance, but with her own hands had bound her head with a long veil of the finest black lace; and finally that the master had come away all pale and trembling till the curling-tongs rattled, and had vowed

two candles of the best. This picturesque story had an immense success; and it was the one day for a story, being a holiday of the Church and moreover very full of sunlight, which made it pleasant to lounge and listen or to answer with lazy gestures and lazier smiles. Never before had the barber's ugly Mary been a person of such importance. She enjoyed a morning of most enviable distinction; but alas! this sudden fame made the blow which fell on her before evening more hard to bear. She was fresh from the well in the Ducal Palace and the repetition of her delightful tale, when she met the Contessa Belrotoli face to face; and lo! the great lady was clad in shining raiment, dressed, as Maria was obliged to confess to herself, as beautifully as the Madonna in her festival gown and jewels. The Belrotoli being heartily tired of seclusion had determined to honour the festival of the Corpus Domini, and to show herself again after some long hours of absence to her beloved Venetians. "They shall see me in my pride," she said to herself as she paced her long chamber. "Shall I be desolate and in black because this Captain has gone to hunt the lion? I too am a lioness. I am robbed of my whelp." So she stepped lion-like, now thinking of Lord Cheepryre as a cub, now picturing the hunter



Tiribomba crawling to her lair, until the hour came when she knew that the Great Piazza would be full. As she set the Belrotoli diamonds in her ears she thought with an unaccustomed thrill of Lucrezia Borgia; and she robed herself in the gay pink muslin of a girl. The black locks straggled weird and elfin on her forehead: the chalky whiteness of her face made her black eyes more black: they gleamed through the blue gauze, which wound about her head blended the startling contrasts of her face to a sickly harmony. Bold as a lioness she stepped into the prying sunlight, and her teeth gleamed in a smile. "But my heart is crushed," she said to herself; though for a crushed heart it was beating with unusual tumult. It leaped still more, when she looked into the Great Piazza and saw the whole length before her and innumerable people. She waited a little, perhaps for more confidence, perhaps that she might not pass unobserved. There was small danger. In a moment those near her were aware of her presence. She was the heroine of the hour, and simple curious folk came hurrying from both sides; but while these came, those in her path fell back and left a passage for her, as she stepped forward on her high heels and with her gleaming smile. So with whispers all about her and under

a thousand eyes the Contessa Belrotoli pursued her triumphant course from end to end of the place, across the broad shadow, across the lessening band of sunshine, into the wonderful old church. She pushed the heavy curtain with imperious hand, and breathed the heavy incense which was pleasant to her. Pleasant too in her eyes were the festal decorations, the banners and emblems which stood above the floor of old mosaic, the tall gilt candlesticks, the abundant artificial flowers. People were kneeling, standing, moving hither and thither, and many stared at the Contessa as she knelt by the side of a tall gilt spike. All around her and low on the pavement was dim yellow vapour, the blurred light of candles in air made misty by censers. In this atmosphere she seemed to breathe more freely, and her eyes wandered more restfully over the illumined floor. Her eyes were full of comfortable colour; and she never looked upward. She never looked, where high above and marking the dulness of this dull candle-light, utterly disdainful of the tinsel fripperies below, came pouring in the broad splendour of the level sun, filling the spacious domes with liquid pure radiance, glorifying the old mosaic with new light, bountiful gold on gold.

The same light, which made the Church of Saint Mark young again, poured in a pitiless flood into the open windows of Mr Hugo Deane, pitiless and inquisitive, revealing dust and disorder. Alone in the garish light half blinded and all uncomfortable Hugo did not care to arrange the blinds. His wife used to arrange them, but she would do it no more. He had refused to believe in her illness; but he believed in it now, for she was dead. He was full of self-pity. He told himself that he was the most unfortunate of men. "What have I done," he moaned, "that I should be deprived of every good thing?" He told himself again and again that he deserved better treatment, but the repetition was infinitely dreary. To insist upon his rights was no solace. Moreover the insistence was no adequate charm against the crowding doubts of his own worth. Never in his life had come an hour so terrible as this. He could think of nothing but himself; and when he would rebuke the injustice of his lot he saw only his own weakness, and saw it with an awful clearness. The women whom he had loved and lost seemed close to him; but they could not comfort him with a touch. Where was the self-sufficiency, the independence on which he had

always prided himself? Like a child he needed support, and with an aching need which no child could feel. He saw with awful clearness the girl who had loved him in his youth. He saw her in her rich beauty and felt again the smile which told of her sweet nature. But he stretched out his arms wearily, and she was not there. Then he turned to the woman who had but just gone from him. There at his elbow was the chair, in which she sat to keep him company because he worked better when she was near. Sometimes he had been irritated by her movements. What would he not give now for the least motion? He had been miserably dependent all his life; he was utterly unfit to stand alone. Without those two women what would he have done? What had he done? It was a startling question. He sank lower in his chair, and his face was haggard as he asked himself, "What have I done?" He told himself that he had lived the life of a student, as he had always meant to live; but there was a mocking echo to his assertion. His studies seemed but fit to be the recreation of a busy man. He had led an idle self-indulgent life, and claimed the respect due to a great workman. He told himself that it was not so; that he had dedicated his life to one purpose; that his

studies had been directed to one object—to the completion of one great and useful work. But again came the questions, which would not be stifled. What progress had he made? Had he any real belief that he would ever complete that work? Had that great history been more for many years past than an excuse for his manner of life—a false claim on others' respect, a false claim on his own? He had been soothing his conscience for years; and now it was awake. But no! he would not believe it. It was a mocking fiend at his elbow, who tortured him with these doubts of himself. He was naturally unstrung. He was not himself. He clung to that thought as the key to the whole matter. He declared that he was not himself that day. And yet something told him in answer and told him again and again, that he was more himself than he had ever been, that in that hour he saw himself without disguise, himself in all his weakness. He was down in a pit; he felt himself strangled; there were fingers at his throat; with an effort his eyes pierced the gloom and he saw himself. He shrank back in his chair fighting as if he were dragging and thrusting somebody from his arms and breast—somebody who was bone of his bone, who could never be cast out.

Presently the door opened ; and he shook himself free of his vision with a sudden terror, a conviction that there was something to hide, that his position in the world his honour in the eyes of men depended on his bearing at that moment, on his mastery over himself. It was Cynthia who stood in the doorway—Cynthia with the sweet colour gone from her cheeks and her eyes made large by weeping. She was very tired and longed to go away by herself, to sit alone and cry ; but she had come to comfort her father, to try rather for she was very fearful of his coldness that day. Like a child who comes to say a lesson at her parent's knee she was murmuring to herself words of consolation as she stood in the doorway. But as she looked at her father, an inspiration changed her purpose in an instant. She went quickly but softly forward and fell on her knees by his side.

“O father, my father,” she said, “I am so lonely, so lonely !” and she bowed her head on his clasped hands.

It was an appeal to him, and his strength and self-respect leapt up at her touch. His confession was made easy. He could unburden his mind without fear. There was a rush of feeling and

quick relief. "I am alone too!" he said and bent his head to hers.

She looked up with eyes full of tears and tender love. "We are together, my father." He was leaning on her, glad of her support and feeling that he supported her, that she was not criticising him. He kissed her tenderly on the cheek, and even as he did so he recognised with a thrill the beautiful propriety of the situation. They were father and daughter, and his taste was charmed. He kissed her again, this time on the forehead, and then he made a movement as if he would raise her to her feet.

### III.





## CHAPTER XVII.

"By-and-by, is easily said."

Now on a certain day in June the swallows departed from Venice and were no more seen wheeling and darting through the sun and shadow of the Grand Canal. The waters sank, the mosquitoes grew strong and venomous, and the colours were heightened to feverish brilliancy. Then hectic autumn passed away, and with it strangers tending homeward. Only Lady Lappin faithful to art and free from a distracting society worked majestically through the winter pinching clay with her fat hands and invoking Pheidias to the aid of her workers in marble, while her lord and master sat beside her and read extracts from the newest fashionable paper.

"It's a bold thing to say," Sir Rupert would remark with a little apologetic laugh, "but it

seems less heavy—more light you know—than the ‘Times.’ It’s quite aristocratic, and you get a great deal that you don’t find in the other papers.” And here he would look doubtfully at his wife, and pat his lips with dubious approbation of their effort. But in spite of his paper and his respectful interest in Fine Art the Baronet was somewhat oppressed by his loneliness. Mr Bonamy Playdell had betaken himself to the Riviera after the most solemn promises of return with spring. The Captain Tiribomba was in Africa, where he was vexing his simple negroes with rigid discipline and a drill invented by himself and adapted to the country. He had obtained leave without difficulty, and he derived a grim satisfaction from the thought that his countrymen did not care whether he discovered anything or furnished a most unsatisfactory meal on the banks of the Congo. The chief organs of Young Italy pointed to his enterprise with triumph, declaring again and again that the country must not be behind the other great Powers in looking after her Central African interests; but the least serious and most popular of Roman papers after observing that Italy among the great Powers was as ill at ease as a girl at her first ball published with a great affectation of reticence the real reasons of

the Captain's journey. It was with a copy of this disrespectful journal among the treasures of her dressing-case that the Contessa Belrotoli departed from Venice. Whither, she could not tell. She was stung by the gad-fly: she was bitten by the mosquito: she could not repose on the bosom of Art with her Brigida: the classical was too cold and she was burning with fever: she was driven to excitement: she would go to Paris for forgetfulness; or ride to the hunt with the mad Englishmen. Such were the floating visions of the Contessa.

Lord Chee-pyre had already joined his horses at Melton. His wedding dreams had been rudely dispelled by the death of poor Mrs Deane; but for all his renewed health his heart was very tender to Cynthia in her sorrow, and he promised himself with glad confidence to come back with spring and Bonnie Playdell. He thought of the Belrotoli with a mixture of terror and pleasure. As an episode in his life nothing could be more delightful than this harmless playing with fire, which had ended with real flash of pistols. But it is sometimes hard to decide when an episode has come to an end. Life is not conveniently divided into chapters. It was capital good sport, as Freddie declared, to find

England full of more or less incorrect versions of his adventure; but he was amazed at the sudden chill with which he heard the rumour that the Contessa would hunt in Leicestershire. He announced that he was out of form and wanted a pick-me-up, but maugre the remedy he did not recover his bloom until he was well assured that the lady was content with equestrian exercise in the Bois de Boulogne. Then he went forth and rode across country with boldness and exhilaration. His nerves were apparently the better for their excitement.

So it happened that Sir Rupert found himself somewhat lonely in Venice, and would have found little to do had he not associated himself with Miss Lindley in her charitable excursions. These two good people gave mutual support as together they supported poorer folk. They trotted about like two children and administered Lady Lappin's bounties. And they had plenty to do, for the winter promised to be cold and not even polenta was plentiful. Many a stout gondolier went hungry, but wrapped a warm cloak around him and comforted his soul with gossip and the certainty that summer would come some day, if it were pleasing to the saints. The life of Sir Rupert

Lappin was flowing with very peaceful current, when it was disturbed by an astounding piece of news. One morning as he sat near his wife, she roused herself with an effort from her artistic abstraction to inform him that she had invited Hugo Deane to take up his abode with all his belongings in the Palazzo Belrotoli. "It will be a privilege to you," she said with much solemnity, "to have such a man under your roof."

Her husband was breathless with astonishment. What a great woman she was to plan and carry out such a scheme without even speaking to him on the subject! "She is a Napoleon," he ventured to say to himself. Miss Lindley, when he told her about it, was moved to no less admiration, but suggested doubts. Sir Rupert freely admitted that it was a bold thing and repeated the admission to himself at odd moments, but his faith in Lady Lappin was triumphant. It seemed almost a pity that Art alone should absorb such extraordinary talents. The plan was eminently successful. Mr Deane accepted the invitation with melancholy grace. He could not say that he should be happy to come, but it was well that he should be nearer to the archives. Nobody knew better than he that work was the best remedy for sorrow. And

he could not stay on the island : he could not bear the associations ; though he observed with a sigh that his daughter seemed willing to remain in the place. He thought it strange that the woman should have the less delicate organisation. In short he accepted the kind invitation of Lady Lappin, though he politely insisted that the arrangement should be regarded as temporary. He prepared to transfer his whole family to Venice ; or rather he permitted them to prepare for their own transfer, while he mused over his MSS. and made himself ready for the solace of work. Old Rosa jumped for sorrow at their going and uttered a thousand exclamations ; but Cynthia looked her last at the sweet place with a strange depression and a dumb thought that life was over for her. She showed little feeling, Hugo thought. And yet the day before, when she rose from milking her favourite cow and met the evening light which came wooingly in to the sweet fragrance of the shed, she had turned back with a sudden passion and leaned her arms and face upon the beast's rough neck, until the tears came. So the girl was carried away, and winter came to the island ; the air was full of peace and melancholy charm ; the goodly kine grew fat in the stalls ; and silence brooded in the place where

fresh Northern voices were heard no more, and no more a bright-haired child pushed the leaves aside or ran along the lawn.

Cynthia drooped in the Palazzo Belrotoli like a transplanted flower, and in her weakness she was haunted by vague regrets. She thought that she ought to have seen how ill her stepmother was, that she had been too busy with her own feelings. If she turned to music for consolation, she feared to disturb her father. She could do little for Fabian, who had established his sway over Sir Rupert and Lady Lappin and who with Cecco lived in a new world of wonderful marble people. Lady Lappin detected in him the true classical appreciation of sculpture, but she was obliged to confess that his sister was dull, or, as Sir Rupert timidly suggested, "slow." So Cynthia had plenty of time for the thoughts which harassed her. She tried not to think of Philip who was painting far away in the South, somewhere with her cousin Stephen. It was a slight link. She sometimes wished that Freddie was there and his cheerful heart. Perhaps she would have sunk into chronic dullness had not Andrew Fernlyn seemed on a sudden to become aware of her existence, and begun to lend her books. Lady Lappin expressed



to him her profound astonishment at "the dear girl's ignorance," but the great man only smiled and offered the child his Shakspeare. Nevertheless for all this new world which a single book opened to her, Cynthia sometimes thought that the winter would never end. She pictured to herself the hours passing with draggled robes and wings depressed. But still they passed away, until on one dull day the air was so mild, that the girl lingered on a bridge in a quiet corner of Venice and leaned her arms for a moment on the straight marble parapet half rubbed away by time. The little bridge was beautiful once upon a time, but its delicate carven tracery and coloured medallions had been smudged and chipped almost to nothingness. There Cynthia leaned and looked into a quaint corner of the familiar city. She could see nothing beyond the almost featureless side of an old palace, which rose sheer from the dull green water and left it no passage save low down through a small grating. In this high wall was one exquisite small window; beside it an old green shutter hung loosely by one hinge; a woman's wrinkled face was looking out unspeculative.

The girl with melancholy wonder was gazing at this old woman who paid her no attention, when

high above her on the right hand was a sudden babble of birds, and looking up with a breathless joy she was aware of Spring on the top of a garden wall. It was only a moment and winter was gone. She drew a long breath and felt the sweet trouble of the time in her heart. She knew the oleander which nodded over the wall with promise of beautiful blossom to come. Mr Fernlyn's little garden was within tucked away in this quiet corner, half on low roof and half on raised soil. It seemed very right to the girl that the salutation of Spring should come to her from thence. The green oleander peeped down in a friendly manner and there was a pleasant babble of birds.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“ 'Tis a very excellent piece of work—  
Would 'twere done ! ”

Now was it fair weather in Venice ; and on the day after Stephen Aylward's return the great windows of Andrew Fernlyn's studio stood wide open to the morning. The master's pupils were full of work, and the master's soul of content. He felt like a young man in that pleasant air and stood ruddy and brown in spite of wrinkles. Within the spacious room the American student was drawing with due solemnity the Chariot of the Soul as described by Plato—the noble horse docile and aspiring, and his dark yoke-fellow sensual and headstrong forced back on his haunches by the full weight and strength of the godlike charioteer. He was drawing deliberately and now and then making brief but trenchant comments on the Platonic philosophy to which he had

been lately introduced. He had bought a Greek grammar and a book of early exercises, for having inherited from a line of successful dry-goodsmen a wholesome suspicion of adulteration he intended to study the Dialogues of Plato in the original.

The English boy was less absorbed than usual in contemplation of the cast from the antique, for the first breath of summer brought truant thoughts of cricket and English elms—truant thoughts which he dismissed with a smile as he turned to his chosen and delightful task, eager to please the master who had made his shiftless life so good. Two other occasional pupils were in close consultation over a large design. Only Stephen Aylward was idle and prepared to defend his idleness. To work he would have held a sorry waste of such a receptive morning—a morning of inspiration. So he lay in a long wicker chair outside the open window and breathed in the beauty of the little garden. He seemed remarkably well and well content with life. “And so you have found something in my cousin after all?” he asked looking up and smiling on the vigorous old man, who stood contemptuous of his laziness.

“Something!” echoed Andrew Fernlyn. “It is only the richest nature that I have ever met. She

ought to be—she shall be—splendid as the pomegranate flower.”

Stephen laughed low. “You too, Maestro?” he said; “well, the girl is pretty.”

“Pretty!” muttered Mr Fernlyn with a contemptuous shrug of his big shoulders. “She is beautiful or will be.”

“Oh for the enthusiasm of youth!” murmured Stephen and he stretched himself in the sun.

“Yes, she will be beautiful,” continued Andrew as if he were talking to himself in the absence of a worthy auditor. “She will be beautiful when she is no longer starved. Already there is new light in her eyes, new vigour in her movements. She was always supremely graceful but with too indifferent a grace. Now the charm works. She needed life and I have given her Shakspeare. He makes her move like an Elizabethan poem with happy strength; he makes her sing full-throated and smile more gaily; he——” And here he broke off his speech as he became aware of his pupil’s critical glance. He turned on him and addressed him defiantly. “It is natural, inevitable as summer. She had been starved, subdued. Subdued! That is one of her father’s theories doubtless.”

Stephen glanced up quickly being amazed at the

scorn which was concentrated in the word "theories." "I thought," he said in a tone of excessive respect, "that you also had some belief in theories."

"There are theories and theories," said Andrew shortly and then after a pause continued, "your uncle is all theory—all form and no substance—a refined profile in black paper. With him there is no room for anything from the abundance of rules of how everything ought to be made. No sir it is a different thing altogether; the cases have nothing in common; I am wholly different; and you are the same pert boy as ever. Will you never grow older?"

"I hope not," said Stephen with much civility; "I should like to stay where I am until you catch me up."

Messer Andrea laughed aloud and seated himself in his own straw chair. He seemed ready to continue the talk, though he again rebuked his pupil for his laziness. "Why don't you go in and draw?" he asked.

"For fear of upsetting one of your artistic theories," answered Stephen promptly, "as Philip will do if you don't look out."

"What has he been doing?" asked the master with interest.

"Well," said Stephen, "last autumn he was full of your receipts for a great picture; he chose a subject beautiful in itself, not modern lest vulgar associations should mar the conception of perfect beauty, Greek because in the Greece of old beauty was in its perfect flower—you recognise the sort of phrases?"

"Well, well?" asked Mr Fernlyn impatiently.

"Well, he made a hash of it," answered the other.

"That's not my fault," said Mr Fernlyn.

"Certainly not," assented Mr Aylward meekly, "but wait a bit. After wasting a couple of months he bundled over his sketches in a great state of excitement, and pulled out one of some workmen at their daily work—modern, uncompromisingly modern."

"Well, well?"

"Well, do you know Maestro mio that if it were possible for any man nowadays to do a good thing in art I should say that Philip had done it."

Mr Aylward's voice was as studiously calm as ever, but there was a slight flush in his cheek as he made this bold assertion.

"As if there were any reason," cried Andrew Fernlyn impetuously, "why a modern should not

do great work! Let him be careful and modest and learn of the ancients!"

"But Philip's picture is modern and yet beautiful—beautiful and yet true, and you don't want to cry when you look at it."

"That is something. You shout with triumph before a great picture, and don't begin to cry."

"It would have a strange effect in picture-galleries," said Stephen demurely.

"You are a cold-blooded pragmatist young impostor!" cried Andrew Fernlyn; "but no matter. Tell me of Young Lamond. He is better than his work. Is he well again, quite well, heart-whole?"

"Oh yes, his heart's all right. He has a most marvellous power of sticking to work, but as to feeling he's as happily inconstant as a weather-cock."

"And so is she happy," cried the old man defiantly. "He need not be afraid of breaking her heart. Her imagination was starved, that's all; and she comes to me for food; and I give her Shakespeare; she will do well; he need not fear."

"You remind me," said Stephen in a contemplative tone, "of that servile genius who for all his servility would not admit the inferiority of the Princess Badoura. But do you mean that she comes here?"



"Often. She sits in this garden, and reads, and forgets the world."

"And these fellows inside?" questioned the other—"the virtuous apprentices? won't they fall in love with her?"

Mr Fernlyn laughed aloud. "Impossible," he said.

"Why impossible?"

"Because they are all in love with her already." And he repeated the word "all" with an air of triumph.

Mr Aylward whistled softly.

"It will do them all the good in the world," continued Andrew cheerfully.

"And she?"

"She is unconscious of it all—royally unconscious. She only feels an atmosphere of kindness around her, and opens like this rose."

"And so," said Stephen, "Badoura is unconscious of it all. Of a truth stupidity is at times a precious gift."

"Ah, if we all had your insight into character!" said Mr Fernlyn grimly. Then his eyes rested for a time on the rosebud by his side and he spoke more softly. "She will be too precious for any of them—yes, yes, too good for you or your Cairo

Camaralzaman either. And what is he going to do with this clever furniture picture of his?"

"Wait till you see it. He wants to show it to you. He will be here in a day or two."

"Is he coming here?"

"For a few days."

Mr Andrew Fernlyn sat for a while in gloomy silence and then said firmly, "I won't have her disturbed."

"Don't be alarmed," said the young man; "he will think of nothing but his picture and of your criticism. The other thing is at an end."

On this Mr Fernlyn vouchsafed no comment but a contemptuous movement of his big shoulders.

It is not strange that Philip Lamond seemed heart-whole in the eyes of his friend. He had been with him every day, and never once in all that winter had he broken forth into passionate exclamations or denunciations of fate. He had worked steadily, sometimes eagerly, and when he spoke his talk was of art-theories or far more often of bits of colour and effects of light seen in the shaded bazaar or open court. Outside the house he paused often to note the divers dresses and many shades of human colouring which filled the streets: within the improvised studio he worked

hard and quietly. In this mood he attacked his classical picture. The subject had been long in his mind, and in old days he had made many studies from the Greek marbles in the British Museum. Brought into personal contact with Andrew Fernlyn he was fired with a fresh enthusiasm for the task. And he needed a task—a task at which he might work day after day and working learn to forget. So as soon as he could leave Cheepyre and Venice, he swept away Stephen in a whirlwind to Athens, saw from the hill of Philopappus the Acropolis at sunset, stared at the Parthenon in the white light of noon, and more chaste and fair in moonshine, and so with eyes and mind filled full of the antique took ship for Alexandria. When the two friends reached Cairo Philip would not rest until he had found a room with good light in which to establish his easel. Then at last he had time to breathe. He was away from Europe and the questions of acquaintance. He allowed himself a day of rest and thought, and then began to draw in his procession. The picture was to be severely classical, beautiful and simple. Young men and boys moved in order due up to the Acropolis. Boyhood in the sweet sunshine with flowers and song, youth in the

joy of its prime and the glory of horsemanship, above all the friendship of noble souls. This was to be expressed on canvas—this and no more. But one thing more would come—the regret of the modern soul. Never before had Philip drawn so well or such beautiful forms; and yet strive as he would for cheerfulness and simplicity more complex feelings expressed themselves in his work. Where was this shadow, which marred all—this shadow of regret? Was it in the expression of the faces or was that clear bright air made dim by tears? The procession was of ghosts in the shades. Now the picture seemed cold and lifeless as the page of a classical dictionary, now infinitely sad, but never simple and cheerful for all its crowns and pipings. So at last he put it aside, and after hunting among many sketches began another picture of some Murano glass-blowers. He attacked it with a kind of fury, and it seemed to come almost too easily. He was somewhat frightened by his success, but worked on steadily. And Stephen Aylward beholding this steadiness and constancy after failure and disappointment said to himself that his friend was indeed heart-whole, strong and free. Perhaps however he came too quickly to a conclusion. A day is long and in

it there is time for many thoughts; and many thoughts will come unbidden; and too late we find that they are not the thoughts which we intended to think. Moreover no man nor woman can think of things only. To the hermit in the desert visions of people known in other days will come, sometimes with dangerous distinctness and disastrous effect. Far more readily will thoughts of persons come to a young man of fervid temperament, let him strive as he may to concentrate his attention on inanimate canvas. So again if his eyes be made by nature and education observant, he cannot but note the passers in the street. Now if there be to him one woman pre-eminent who has influenced his character, every person whose image comes into his mind or who passes before his eyes, suggests that one woman either by likeness or contrast. It is certain that something had influenced the character of Philip Lamond. There was a change in him, as Stephen could see. He was far more steady in work; he talked much less, and very little about himself. He sought no more safety-valves for tempestuous feeling in violent movements and outcries, in striding and storming. And Mr Aylward observing this calmness in the wild

friend of his youth concluded that his feelings were no more tempestuous, that here was the beginning of temperate dull successful manhood; and thereupon he said with a sigh that of course it was all right and a very good thing.

## CHAPTER XIX.

*Painter.* "It is a pretty mocking of the life.  
Here is a touch : is't good !"

"I do wish you would get over this trick of appearing like a jack-in-the-box or the hero of a melodrama. A clap of thunder: enter Philip Lamond. It's very distressing." So spake Stephen Aylward looking up at his friend, who had entered his room and seized him not too gently by both shoulders.

"You knew I was coming," said Philip: "you have been longing for my presence: Cairo was insupportable without you, or rather it was too hot: my picture was finished, or rather I could do no more to it; so I have come to show it to the master. I have come to show my picture to Mr Andrew Fernlyn, and moreover—but no matter."

"Moreover what? Oh, but I don't want your

confidence." Stephen was a little ruffled by the sudden arrival of his friend.

Philip seated himself on the edge of the table and after regarding Mr Aylward for some minutes with quiet attention said almost coldly, "Moreover I have come to look at her."

This speech jarred and irritated the other young man, and he cried sharply, "Good Heavens, Philip! how can you be so foolish? I did think," he continued more plaintively, "that all that was over. Of course it's no business of mine, but isn't it a pity to go and galvanise your feelings when you are all right again and have forgotten her?"

"Forgotten her!" repeated Lamond after a pause, and he smiled as he spoke. "And so you think that I have forgotten her. You are a remarkably cool sensible young person, confound you! but after all you are a man. I must see her; and you must help me."

"No. It would be bad for you and unfair to her. I would rather quarrel with you, and have done with it."

"You don't understand me. I don't wish her to see me. I would not run the risk of paining her for all the East. But I must see her; I must see



for myself that she is happy and well without me. Then I shall go away content."

"But I can tell you——"

"Nobody can tell me; I must see for myself; forgive me old boy; I don't mean that I can't trust you; but I must see her."

Upon this Stephen Aylward shrugged his shoulders and abandoned the discussion. "Very well," he said; "to-morrow morning we will take the picture to old Andrew, and then what you will."

"Then I will wash off the dust of travel," said Philip; "and you will send out for supper; and we will sup together here again; there is nothing like Venice on a summer night."

To this speech he received no answer. Mr Aylward was moodily considering how hard it was to foretell his friend's actions; how impulsive and irrational he was; how comical it was that he Stephen should have a comrade so irritating and disturbing. However he roused himself and sent for supper.

The next morning Philip was up betimes, singing, helping the preparations for breakfast, unpacking and criticising his picture, rebuking Stephen for his laziness. At last when breakfast was over and the day far enough advanced, the two friends

carried down the precious canvas, and gave it the place of honour in their gondola. So it voyaged down the Grand Canal veiled from the happy morning light, then turned aside from the great stream to gain the door of the critic, and so stood presently uncovered before his eyes.

Andrew Fernlyn, who had already regarded the young painter with shrewd attention, now looked at his picture long and carefully. It unquestionably demanded consideration, if only by its daring. There was the glow of a hot furnace fire, and dark against it the central figure of a young glassblower. He stood firm on his feet with the lithe body bent a little backward, the chin raised, and at his lips the long tube straight as an arrow and slanting boldly upward like a triumphal trumpet. The intensest light, the most fiery spark of colour, was caught in the molten ball which his breath was forming. High above his head the cool clear light of day was creeping in and lay upon the wall. On either side of the chief worker men and boys some more some less in shadow all half-naked in the heat were working or lounging.

"Isn't the colour too strong?" asked Stephen when the silence began to get on his nerves. "It's Egypt, not Murano."

"What does that matter?" asked Andrew Fernlyn; "the colour is well enough: the thing has unusual richness and splendour. It's good enough, if it's worth doing."

"That is the question," said Philip.

"Ain't you on the wrong tack?" continued the master; and he grasped the young man by the arm as he continued warmly, "You feel it, you feel it; I can see in every line that you feel it: you feel the want of beauty, you long for it, you need a beautiful subject; and you go out of your way for a common one; and then you can't be content with it, and you must put in the beauty. Just look at this yourself. Is that an Italian workman? No, he is a young Theseus winding his horn in the forest. And these others? They are hampered by a few Venetian rags and rubbish, but they are in the Gymnasium at Athens. All these here are in free leisure watching the wrestling, and this one stoops for a quoit and not to poke the fire. You have been dancing in fetters my young friend."

"And yet," said Philip after a pause, "these fellows have much more life in them than the people whom I made Greek on purpose."

"Yes, that is strange," answered Mr Fernlyn thoughtfully; "but any way it is wrong. It won't

do, and you had better take it to Paris or London and sell it. I will give you a letter to a dealer. It will do very well to sell." He spoke seriously, but Philip Lamond laughed as he thanked him.

Meanwhile Stephen Aylward perceiving that the master had got astride of his hobby had strolled to the window, but had no sooner looked into the garden than he turned back and stood waiting until the art talk should end. As soon as there was silence once more, he spoke out distinctly and said to Mr Fernlyn, "I see, Maestro, that my cousin Cynthia is in your garden."

Philip felt the blood tingle in his cheeks, and Andrew looked at him and then defiantly at the other young man.

"She is buried in her book," said Aylward lightly and added, "how well she looks."

"Yes, she is very well," said Mr Fernlyn grimly, and there was a moment of silence.

Then said Philip mildly, "I hope that she has got over the shock of Mrs Deane's death." The speech sounded painfully conventional in his ears, but he was forced to say something.

"Yes," said old Andrew stoutly, "she has got over many things. She has begun a new life, less narrow, more free. I have been able to do some-

thing for her, and she has done much for herself. I have given her Shakspeare, and shown her what to read and what to avoid. It is a splendid character. She only needs to be let alone, to have room to grow in liberal air and light. Yes, she needs to be let alone. Her argosies are coming home—coming with ivory silks and peacocks.” He was waxing warm, but he stopped somewhat abruptly in the full flood of his enthusiasm, as he caught Stephen’s look critical, a little offended.

Philip said nothing but he moved quietly to the window and looked out. The garden was a little wilderness of fair flowers. The tide of May roses had ebbed; but carnations the wholesome bright Venetian flowers were there in plenty. Plentiful too was rosemary for sweet perfume, and a single magnolia gave its richer scent to the air. There were geranium and hydrangea; and the tiny path was arched with jasmine and honeysuckle. The oleander, that nodded over the wall and peeped into the quiet water below, was proud of its first pink blossoms; but they paled before the new flowers of the pomegranate brave with vivid flame-colour amid the multitudinous bright little leaves. Under a trellis, where the tendrils of the vine were weaving shade, half-screened from view

and white amid the pleasant colours the young girl was reading and away in an old and a new Venice. She was reading of Shylock and Antonio; and the old familiar city seemed to be fresh risen from the sea. The close acquaintance with the place and the sense of its strangeness and novelty together made for her an indescribable charm, as if a stranger cried out in wonder at the beauty of a face dear to her and known too well for her own praising.

Portia appealed to her new friend with overwhelming power. Cynthia too breathed for a while the liberal air of Belmont, felt the noble gracious life, laughed with the girl's gay humour, thrilled with the woman's magnificent audacity, bowed with her beautiful submission.

"Though for myself alone  
I would not be ambitious in my wish,  
To wish myself much better; yet for you  
I would be trebled twenty times myself;—"

As the girl read, some unacknowledged thought beyond the beauty of the words flushed all her cheek. She was charmed by the proud maiden's surrender of herself, though Bassanio for all his splendour and debts his easy generosity and

princely love-making was all unworthy of his fate. It was the surrender itself which was beautiful. And yet this tale of old-world love had a power beyond itself that morning. Either Cynthia had passed back into a more passionate age, or there in the old painter's garden and in the heart of a faded Venice there was a new power in the air, or a presence which troubled the young girl's serenity.

"Is she not beautiful?" murmured Andrew Fernlyn. He had followed Philip to the window that he might draw him away, but had remained himself absorbed in contemplation.

Philip turned away with a groan, and Stephen pressed his arm with unwonted tenderness.

"Let her alone, let her alone," muttered the master, as if he were repeating his formula to the universe. "Oh you young men, disturbers of harmony," he continued in an absent tone, "O gioventu primavera della vita."

"And about the picture?" said Philip firmly. "Perhaps you will send me that letter to the dealer. I can't stop here long. Thank you, thank you." And he wrung Mr Fernlyn's hand more forcibly than he knew.

## CHAPTER XX.

"O you are sick of self-love Malvolio and taste with a distempered appetite."

Now it became evident to some of his pupils that the mind of Mr Andrew Fernlyn was busy with unusual thoughts. He had a habit of addressing himself in a low voice when he walked alone ; and he now communed with himself so much that he had no talk for others. He was seen arguing with and persuading himself, smiling at some anticipated triumph, cutting short oratorical gestures which might have been majestic. A young Italian did not hesitate to assert that the master was in love ; the English boy shook with laughter and delight ; but the American student though there was something like a smile in his eyes frowned disapproval at the profanity. And yet even he began to suspect that there was some change in the revered Mr Fernlyn,



for after a week's consideration he had been unable to find any meaning in the master's last criticism of his Charioteer of the Soul. The great critic had stared at the drawing, which was now nearly finished, with apparent attention and had at last given voice to his conclusion in the words, "Yes, yes, Badoura must be emancipated." Having delivered himself of this enigmatical speech he departed into the garden and resumed his occupation of walking backward and forward among the flowers. He was indeed full of thoughts. Now he formed a purpose; now he allowed it to dissolve. One morning as he was discoursing with himself he found Stephen sketching under the vine leaves, and burst upon him with the words, "I thought that your friend Lamond was cured of his love-sickness."

"So he is," said the sketcher not even looking up from his work.

"Indeed!" was Mr Fernlyn's comment and he took another turn on the grass. "He is here still?" he asked when he came back to his pupil.

"Oh yes," answered Stephen busy with his brush.

"And why?" asked the other again.

"He likes to be with me."

"That fully explains it. It is a great gift, pene-

tration. Youth is always so certain, and so modest."

"Look here Maestro mio," said Stephen presently, when the lapse of time had again brought the peripatetic philosopher to his side, "you needn't distress yourself about this thing. Even if Philip still have a remnant of affection, a spark in the ashes, he knows well enough now that she is all right, that she never cared very much about him."

"Oh, he knows that, does he?"

"He'd be a fool if he didn't. He sees that she has grown handsomer and happier since he went away."

"Thank you," said Mr Fernlyn with apparent gratitude. "Thank you for setting me right, my Polus."

"What do you mean by Polus?" asked Stephen looking up with a smile; but the sage only growled in answer and resumed his march.

At last after many days of exercise and hesitation Mr Fernlyn made up his mind to action. He determined that his princess Badoura should be absolutely free, should in the fulness of time be able to choose for herself a husband without consideration of her father's pocket or pride. This end could only be attained by making Mr Deane


independent of his daughter ; and with this object in view Mr Fernlyn devised two schemes, of which the favourite was kept wholly to himself and made him laugh aloud in solitude ; while to carry out the other he was forced to seek the co-operation of Stephen Aylward. So once more he seized upon that young man and announced to him that his Uncle Hugo was to live for ever with Sir Rupert and Lady Lappin, that the plan was necessary for Cynthia's freedom, and finally that it must be done.

"Hugo must be induced to stay," he said, "as a favour—a great favour. He must stay where he is, and you must arrange it."

"Impossible."

"But necessary. We can do it. You need my youthful ardour. You annoy me with your man-of-the-world prudence and doubts. Go at once ; go and hint to Lady Lappin that your uncle thinks of going ; she will be in despair, and an arrangement will be made."

"It's all very well," said Stephen slowly, "but I suspect that you reckon without your host, or rather without your hostess. The dear woman is intent on some plan of her own. I have been a good deal at the Casa Lappin lately, and I am sure that she



is busy about something. But, as I have the caution of my years, I shall not explain myself farther."

"As you please," said the master shortly, "but go to my lady; see for yourself how the hero-worshipper likes the thought of losing her man of genius. Go, come back, and report."

Stephen Aylward smiled as one who humours a child and pocketed his sketch-book. The young man was not wholly wrong in his belief that Lady Lappin was chiefly occupied with the affairs of another than Hugo Deane. It was true that she had formed a plan and had concentrated her powers on its fulfilment; but unhappily she had failed and was now sitting disconsolate and in a tragic pose amid the ruins of her edifice. A few weeks had passed since she had been rudely shaken from her artistic calm by the news of Mr Bonamy Playdell's return to Venice. Why had he come, she asked herself, and she leapt at the answer to her question. It is true that he had promised to return, but Lady Lappin held that men do not keep promises of this kind unless they have some special purpose. Had not his conduct in the previous summer been full of meaning to the discerning eye? She had noted that romantic, almost mediæval, air; there had certainly been

something Byronic about him, though she could not remember if it were in his speech or his collars. But however that might be, there could be no doubt of his chivalrous attentions to Miss Lindley. Lady Lappin had cherished a thousand suspicions, which the cavalier's return converted into certainty. So she straightway descended from the mountain of the Muses, and enveloped her maiden friend treating her with that air at once benevolent and knowing, equally patronising and respectful, which some women reserve for that one among them who is doomed to the great experiment. And yet when the agreeable Bonamy appeared before her, as he made haste to do, there was that about him which she found it hard to reconcile with the ardent wooer. He came to announce the speedy arrival of the Contessina, and at the endearing diminutive he kissed the tips of his fingers with an air of indiscriminate gallantry to the sex. He was furnished with the very last Parisian anecdote of the lady, who had already abandoned the centre of French turmoil, was flying to Venice and yearning, as Mr Playdell declared, for the soothing friendship of her Brigida. Indeed he had the last news of everybody, including a full account of that fall over timber which still de-

tained the luckless Cheepyre in England, though, if Bonamy were to be believed, he too was pining to be again in Venice. In short Mr Playdell was gay debonair instructive, agreeable to all, attentive though not exclusively attentive in the right quarter; and yet there was no indication of the great experiment.

It was in vain that Lady Lappin consulted those maidenly uncertain and gentle eyes, which drooped before her own; gave hints of her readiness to receive confidences, which Miss Lindley most sweetly ignored; tried to make her smooth face express surprise warning and rebuke for the benefit of Mr Playdell. Still there was no sign of the great event; and as the days went by and nothing done, the diplomatic lady became almost tragic. She could not bear this atmosphere charged with human passion, electrical before the storm. Her creative mood was destroyed; she could not work; she paced her apartment until she was out of breath, and sat down panting. At last she felt that a limit must be put to this disquiet, that it was wicked to prolong this sacrifice of art, that she must speak. She acquainted Sir Rupert with her determination; and on the appointed day he went off furtively to tremble by himself in a distant part

of the city. Then she summoned the lagging wooer by a little note, and received him with portentous stateliness. It might have been suspected that so consummate a man of the world as Mr Bonamy Playdell would have guessed the reason of this interview. Yet he appeared to be overwhelmed with astonishment. He was in a flutter of delight at what he took to be almost an offer. He was in despair at the idea that he had inflicted pain on one so long dear to him. He was excited, delighted, shocked; he protested; he gave expression to various contradictory feelings; he appealed to his dear Lady Lappin with the artlessness of a too fascinating boy, the grace and eloquence of an orator. He pressed his hands upon his bosom. But beneath the tumult of varying emotions lay one constant thought, that it would be an awful revolution to alter all his habits at his time of life. "You know my passion for liberty," he cried to the lady, while he was considering whether as a married man he would be free to fly to Germany at the first symptom of gout. However he had debated this and a great many similar questions many times before, and he was not unprepared to yield himself to a rash but generous impulse. He tossed back his head with a vivid recollection of the

Corsair, and rushed to meet his fate. "I will waste no time in words," he cried to Lady Lappin; "you will hear of me; *a rivederci*." He waved his hand, darted from the room, and ran down-stairs with surprising agility. Still glowing with generosity, intent on rewarding a lifelong fidelity, murmuring that she should not love in vain, he was borne in his gondola to his lady's door. She was at home, and he was admitted. He mounted the steps boldly but with beating heart, ready to sacrifice himself cheerfully; he was received graciously, and was graciously but firmly rejected. Perhaps his words were not well chosen, and betrayed too clearly the generosity of the offer. Perhaps the purpose of Lady Lappin had been too clear to feminine eyes. Certain it is that an atmosphere of maidenly reserve, the air of the old home amid the English pastures, was about the gentle lady that morning. The gentleman felt its repressing influence; he had never thought her so charming as when he bowed over her hand with an old-fashioned politeness and murmured his adieux. Her eyes were very pink that evening, and she gathered a little knitted shawl about her slender shoulders as she sipped her tea.

Thus it happened that when Stephen Aylward went to spy out the land for Andrew Fernlyn, Lady



Lappin had just heard that her plan was a failure after all, and was sitting in becoming melancholy among the ruins. She was alone and mournfully tasting the flavour of loneliness. To her in such a mood the idea of further bereavement was intolerable. It was truly tragical to be deserted at once by her art and by the most delightful of gossips, to be condemned to idleness without those anecdotes of a society which she despised. Sir Rupert and his fashionable paper could not fill the void. She had been robbed of her chief storyteller by the cruelty of fate and of Miss Lindley; and she leaned with a studied but delusive appearance of repose against her marble awaiting the inspiration which would not come.

In this attitude she was discovered by Stephen Aylward who was half amused half bored by his mission. The young man after a few remarks on indifferent subjects asked with assumed carelessness when she supposed that his uncle would leave the Palazzo Belrotoli.

The lady started and stood upright enforcing silence with a gesture; then she swept across the room and drawing aside the heavy curtain called Mr Deane with a voice full of sorrow. "Oh Mr Deane," she said, as that gentleman strolled in

followed by Fabian and Cecco, "you are not going to leave us? Say that you are not going to leave us."

Hugo flushed slightly, as he nodded to his nephew, and muttered something indefinite about the kindness of his hostess and the obligation not to take advantage of it. "I need not say that for myself I am in no hurry to go," he said with a little bow and smile which was his nearest approach to heartiness.

"But the obligation is ours—the privilege is ours," answered Lady Lappin; "you know my feeling for genius," and she pressed her plump hands together and looked up at her guest with expressive eyes.

Hugo had a keen taste for the more delicate forms of flattery, but was a little uneasy when he received direct adoration under the eyes of a third person. "Perhaps I had better speak to your husband," he said in a tone which was intended to put an end to the subject.

"But promise me that this shall be your home—that you will always regard this as your home."

Mr Deane was uncomfortable. He was by no means blind to the advantages of accepting such an offer. He knew that he had never been so well

off, though he indulged in many sighs over the past. He enjoyed the respect of Sir Rupert and the worship of Lady Lappin, which were accompanied by no provoking efforts to understand him. He had an intense appreciation of that matter-of-course luxury which was marred by no blotted figures, no greasy books, no mean calculation of expenses. He had always thought that such was the atmosphere, such the surroundings, for which he had been formed by a considerate nature. He had been fond of fancying himself a literary prince, a patron of many talents inferior to his own, exquisitely refined in criticism as in life, a nineteenth-century Lorenzo. He had never been so well as under the Belrotoli roof; and he felt sure that his work would bloom into more splendour in this bounteous air. Now all these good things were offered to him for ever. He might learn to look on Sir Rupert as a Chamberlain and Chancellor, whose duty it would be to provide those vulgar external goods without which even the superior person cannot live and the higher order of work is impossible. He might even regard his good hostess as a kind of female Michel Angelo lending lustre to his life.

All these good things were offered to him; but

all were offered in a bunch and with insufficient delicacy. He had only to stretch out his hand; but he did not like stretching out his hand. The request was humble enough; but it should have been made in private. He was conscious of the unspoken criticism of his idle young nephew, and he resented it. He was asked to confer a benefit; but this irritating youth was likely to hold that he received one. So Mr Deane was offended and was beginning to be cross, when Lady Lappin put a hand upon his arm and said quickly and earnestly, "You will not take the child from us."

Hugo glanced down with a smile and a warm sense of relief. "Would you like to leave your good Lady Lappin, and all the statues?" he asked and dropped his hand lightly on little Fabian's curls.

"No, no, no," cried the boy, and he began to dance round her laughing.

"We have none of our own," said the woman simply and in a low voice.

There was real feeling in the words, and Mr Deane was touched. "I cannot take him from you," he said and was pleased with his magnanimity.

"How good you are," cried she; "how unselfish

and good." She took his elegant hand in her two soft palms, and then dropped it that she might catch Master Fabian, who eluded her with rapture. She made frequent plunges at him, forgetful of the folds of her drapery, until presently he rushed into her arms with a shout and was lost in a motherly embrace. Having secured him she remembered again that she was the artist; as she held him to her ample bosom, she enjoyed a vivid recollection of the Niobe, while Fabian all flushed with laughter struggled in her arms and Cecco snapped playfully at her heels.

"Well? When is he going to leave the Palazzo Belrotoli?" asked Mr Fernlyn.

"Never," answered Stephen slowly.

"I thought I was right this time," said the master, and he rubbed his hands pleasantly together.

## CHAPTER XXI.


"But love from love, toward school with heavy looks."

FAIR rose the morn, and fair rose Mr Bonamy Playdell in spite of somewhat troubled sleep. He had been disturbed by wayward dreams, and this was an unprecedented event in the stream of an existence very full and yet as smooth as oil. He awoke therefore with a feeling of awe which he in vain strove to dispel. As he stood on the polished floor, he told himself that he had reason to be proud of his conduct, to be glad that he had escaped the probable consequences. He tried to sponge himself into a glowing appreciation of his liberty. "I am free," he cried making most vigorous use of the towels. "Oh liberty"—but somehow he stuck fast in his apostrophe, and felt the enthusiasm ooze from his finger-tips. It was in vain that he shook himself at intervals and roused

himself spasmodically to content. As the business of dressing went on, his efforts became more and more languid. Not even the action of his two brushes could warm him to pleasure; and he gradually descended until he found refuge in the tepid phrase, "Anyway I have done the right thing." He had done the right thing, and that was a real consolation to him. Everything was ready for his departure from Venice, and he hoped that at a distance he might take a warmer interest in his freedom. Calm and resigned he sought his breakfast; but a blow awaited him therewith. His Italian servant, who had been with him for years and understood all his ways as no other man had ever done, announced with expressions of extreme regret that he could not accompany his master. And the cause! Bonamy's ears tingled as he listened. The faithful domestic was about to wed Miss Lindley's English maid. He explained with childlike candour that he had first thought of this plan when his Maria had assured him that the two households were to be united; that it had struck him at once as peculiarly fit that he and Maria should together take charge of the master and mistress, whose little fancies and oddities they knew so well; that, since his master was going

away, he should of course have gone with him, but happening to meet his English Maria the evening before he had witnessed her agony, which it was impossible for the Signor Padrone to figure to himself; that finally he had yielded himself with a shrug; that what will be will be; that he regretted very much the necessity of leaving suddenly so suitable a master; but that there was no certainty in a world whereto women were admitted.

Mr Playdell listened with a dumb determination to defer the certainty that he would be uncomfortable without a valet. Everything was prepared for this journey at least, and afterwards he might light upon a treasure. He put aside the anticipations of ill-polished boots, garments creased by folding, thin chocolate, and the thousand and one horrors which threatened him in the future. He bore himself bravely before the bowing crowd of waiters, and stepped into the gondola after his luggage with becoming dignity. But here even in this comfortable seat was he again moved to vain regret. It was a hardship to leave the city which he loved upon so fair a morning. Never had it compelled his romantic nature with such irresistible power. There had been a smart shower before dawn, and all the faded






colours on the long curve of the Grand Canal were washed and brightened. All the white flourishes and fantasies of the high domed church of S. Maria della Salute were bright and buoyant in the buoyant air; apostles and prophets were riding boldly out upon their marble wheels. It was Mr Playdell's favourite church, and he marked its beauty with a sigh. Triumphant down the broad canal sped the gondola and the morning light was following, but the heart of Bonamy could not throb with the triumph of the day. Things had gone wrong with him; he felt the insufficiency of liberty as an end of human existence. It was doubtless a great matter to be free to go where he wished; but then came the question, where he wished to go; and Bonamy began to think that he did not care where he went. Mr Playdell hoped that his wonted equanimity would return when he had once fairly started and left his troubles behind him. Heretofore he had had no objection to a day in the train. With a book and a paper, the right corner of the carriage, and the happy belief that his man was "seeing to everything," he had passed many tranquil hours now reading now musing ever and anon sinking into oblivion. To-day it was otherwise. He was haunted by thoughts of his luggage.

He could not keep himself from glancing nervously over his head at his favourite umbrella, from stooping for a view of his dressing-case which lay under the opposite seat. He dolefully thought that his condition suggested mania. If he dozed for a moment, he woke with a start and a horrible conviction that he had forgotten the number of packages in the van. He leaned his head upon his hand, and pitied himself very much. He saw himself growing old and older as a wanderer by rail, while his bones became more sensitive to the perpetual rattle, and his failing memory was incapable of retaining the number of his boxes. He saw himself as a poor old man uncomfortable plundered and lonely. His loneliness began to weigh upon him. There was nobody in all that train who cared if he were comfortable or no. The very valet, in whom he had trusted, had never cared for him. No confidence could be placed in hirelings.

Bonamy sentimentally thought that if he had a mother, or a sister, a kind aunt, or—but what was the use of such thoughts. He must prepare himself for a desolate old age. At last he began to think of luncheon; and he then awoke to the discovery that his luncheon-basket had been put in the van.

There was a well-chosen luncheon among the luggage, so near and by no effort to be obtained. After a thrill of nervous fear, a flurried search in many pockets, this nineteenth-century Tantalus discovered the flimsy paper, and read the fatal number thereon inscribed. It was too true. No calculation of the number of boxes could alter the fact that the luncheon, which now appeared delicious, was separated from him, and could not be his until they arrived at Milan and it was time for dinner. At this point he became interested in his fellow-travellers, who were unpacking a little basket and were mighty merry over their task. They were a young man and woman, a little commonplace perhaps—but how happy they were, for they were together. Bonamy supposed that they were on their honeymoon, and his mild soul protested against their mutual admiration. They had their little jokes, which he was certain were very poor. They had their little luncheon, which he was certain was by no means bad; but they were sublimely indifferent to the existence of anybody in the world or in the railway carriage except themselves. Mr Playdell turned away his head and sighed. "Ah happy youth," he thought, "who hast secured for thyself a comrade for life, a com-

fort for old age." He sighed again, and pressed his handkerchief to his eyes, that he might shut out the sight of their mutual tenderness. The young couple prolonged their meal in merriment and pure gaiety of heart. At one of the stations Mr Playdell not without some palpitations darted from the carriage, and returned with specimens of divers kinds of cake. They were all disappointing, for none were fresh, some were leathery, while the best recalled the sponginess rather than the flavour of the superior bun. It seemed that some of the grit from the railroad had been compounded with them, and the hungry man bit hard upon an iron fragment. He had never been able to enjoy a bun in public, and he now glanced nervously at the young people; but finding that they paid him no attention, he was hurt by this continued indifference. It was clear that they did not care to consider for a moment who he was; and Bonamy had never got over the youthful pleasure of exciting curiosity in strangers. He liked the consciousness of sidelong glances, and was wont to please himself with wondering if people took him for a diplomatist, a great artist, or even a potentate travelling incognito. Now the eyes of these selfish young persons were never once turned upon



him ; and if they had been, what would they have cared for an unattended elderly gentleman, who tumbled into the train with buns.

As the day wore on, the sun became unpleasantly bright and the great plain seemed hot and arid. Minute dust worked its way into the carriage, and into Mr Playdell's skin. His mouth was dry, and he left half his cakes uneaten. He felt that his nose was red, and spent much time in wondering if he should grow fatter as he grew older. It was a melancholy subject of thought, but alas ! he could not banish it. He was oppressed by himself, by a self which grew slowly larger, until in the dim distance he discerned a time when he would be too large for a single seat in the train. He would be still lonely and neglected, still travelling, but paying always a double fare. There were several flies in the carriage, but only one that harassed Bonamy. He thought that it must be a very old fly, who had been tempted out of some neglected crevice by the extraordinary warmth of the day. The hoary insect sat torpid on his knee, until he pushed it off ; then it moved a few inches and preyed upon a neglected fragment of cake conjuring grim visions of pastrycooks' flies in stifling streets ; then with a dull buzz it rose and dropped on Mr Playdell's

hair, and he felt it as he swept it off. It was horribly indifferent and heavy. Bonamy remembered with dull surprise that he ought to be enjoying the reward of virtue; that he had done the noble thing; that he had intended to glory in his liberty. Unluckily he had chosen to ignore the gaping wound which his vanity had received. Like the Spartan boy he hid the fox, which gnawed his vitals, from his own as from the eyes of others. But he had been refused, and he did not like it. It was not in his nature to cherish resentment; but he pitied himself profoundly, while he assured himself that there was no cause for pity, that he ought to be congratulated. It was in vain that he struggled. He felt that he was alone for life, that he should never find a satisfactory servant, that no woman would ever call him hers. And so Mr Bonamy Playdell was in the depths of depression when the train moved into Milan.

At the station Mr Playdell was more fortunate. After all he had not lost his ticket, nor left his umbrella; he found all his boxes; he began to hope that he should enjoy his dinner. After that meal he almost ventured to predict that on the morrow he would be himself again. But it was not to be. He awoke with no sense of exhilara-

tion ; and he soon perceived that rain was falling sullenly. The house was unbearable ; and so after breakfast he went forth to comfort himself with a sight of the Cathedral, which he had always vastly admired. But in order to reach it he was obliged to pass down a long straight and dull street, which oppressed him by its monotony. Moreover though his favourite umbrella protected his hat, his feet became damp, and Bonamy had a feline aversion from wet feet. He picked his way, but to no purpose. Even the Cathedral was unutterably dreary in the steady rain and reminded its admirer of a beautiful wedding-cake which had been accidentally left out in the wet. He turned away with a sort of groan, and returned to the hotel where he chanced on an odd volume of an old English novel. Therewith he solaced himself throughout the longest day that he had ever known. A life made up of such days it was impossible to face. At dinner-time Mr Playdell roused himself with an effort and ordered champagne. As he watched the beaded bubbles of his second glass a great thought struck him. All might be redeemed. Why not ? For the first time in two whole days the flush of youthful enthusiasm was apparent in his cheek ; and a meek lady op-

posite to him dropped her eyes before his daring glance. As he left the table he was humming to himself with gallant martial air—

“He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his desert is small,  
Who fears to put it to the touch  
To win or lose it all.”

The next morning firm of purpose he demanded a ticket for Venice.



## CHAPTER XXII.

“Here comes the little villain :  
How now my nettle of India ?”

Now it chanced that on that very day, which the amiable Bonamy passed so sadly in Milan, the Contessa Belrotoli after weeks of unnatural seclusion emerged once more to light and life. Who can tell the cause of her solitude ? Perhaps she had been the prey of a devouring melancholy : perhaps she had had a pimple on her nose. It may be that like the moon she had veiled herself in clouds that she might break upon the jaded world as a new marvel. But whatever its cause, the mysterious loneliness now came to an end ; and the gentle heart of Lady Lappin which had been deeply pained by her friend's neglect was again refreshed by an opportunity of affording sympathy. There was the swish of a long silken gown upon the

stairs, and a quick high voice calling. Then the door of the studio was thrust open, and the Belrotoli darting in flung herself against the working-apron of her artistic Brigida, and was lost in her embrace. But even in the joy of the moment the English woman sighed for her Art, which was again to be sacrificed to the ephemeral interests of the day. Reassured as to the intentions of Hugo Deane and having almost satisfied her heart by gathering around her an entire ready-made family, she had turned again to her beloved work with dignity and ardour. Now the outer world broke in on her again; and she received it open-armed. In spite of the regret in her bosom the inexhaustible fountain of sympathy leapt at the lightest call. It was unlucky for the artist that the woman was so sympathetic and so comfortable, that people, when they saw her, began to wonder if there were nothing which they could confide to her. She was like a fountain in a dry plain of Palestine, whose waters are ever troubled by thirsty creatures. Disturbed and interested by a thousand trifles she could attain but rarely to complete abstraction, to receptive calm, could but rarely yield herself wholly to the divine afflatus.

The Countess was so absorbed by her own condi-

tion that she had no idea that she had marred a rare moment. "He is coming," she cried; "he is coming back to me."

"Who?" asked the other breathlessly, as her thoughts passed slowly from man to man, and dwelt with a peculiar fear on young Lord Chee-pyre, whose late arrival in Venice she was most anxious to conceal from the Belrotoli.

"Who! Ah wicked little one!" cried the Countess pushing herself abruptly back from her more solid friend. "Who but the Count, my husband."

Lady Lappin looked at her with infantine eyes and mouth round with astonishment. It was not the first time that the Countess had flung herself into her arms, and poured forth torrents of speech about this same lord and master; but on all previous occasions the confidant had shivered before the fiery language of the injured wife, and the Clapham element in her composition had been shocked by too energetic expressions. She had formed in her mind an image of the Count, in which the ingenuity of Mephistopheles, the sensuality of Don Juan, and the brutality of a Lancashire wife-kicker were concealed under one highly-polished surface.

Threatened with the nearer acquaintance of this awful if fascinating mixture and abruptly called

upon for delight in the prospect, the worthy lady trembled and turned pale. "Ah you too think," cried the Belrotoli, "even you, that my passion is not domestic. You are wrong: it is my dream, my frenzy, always—always the 'ome and 'earth!"

"You are so right," said her friend, "so right." She was recovering her equanimity, and saw the path of duty.

"And I have come to you, my own," continued the Contessa clasping her long fingers together; "I am so out of the round, so forgetful of how it is done. I cannot tell how to become in a moment your Derby and John. But you will guide me? you will teach me? will you not?"

"That I will," promised Lady Lappin boldly though there was awe in her heart, for slowly were coming back to her many stories more or less black of the Conte Belrotoli, and her troubled eyes wandered uneasily over the golden and silver trifles with which she loved to decorate her tables. Moreover infant prejudices still found a home in that ample and hospitable person, prejudices which were especially thick around the title of Count as worn by a foreigner. It had been generally held by the girls at the Clapham school that the dancing-master who came once a-week was a Count, and had

assumed his profession as a means of ingratiating himself with heiresses of a saltatory disposition. The girl Bridget had read romances when she had had no expectation of living under the same roof with an Italian count. What if this darkling nobleman should employ the Bravo of Venice to murder his wife? What hope was there of artistic calm in a palace redolent of such possibilities? What hope of that profound and placid sleep, which was wont to restore so surely and so regularly her creative energy, when on any night the death-shriek of the victim—but it was too horrible. She held the Countess tight, and glanced nervously at the walls, of which any one might contain that secret passage known only to successive counts and to a long line of rats. None the less stoutly did the Lady Lappin determine to stand by her friend. The Contessa for her part was full of enthusiasm. She had remained for a time in a silence eloquent of expression; but now she broke out again. "I must do it well," she said; "I must be the very best housewife that ever was, with slippers always in the fire, cold baths and prayers *en famille*, and breakfast of sausages and bacon at 9, 8, 7,—at what hour? And he shall read the Journal to me like your adorable Rupert, and I will write in little red

books. I see it all: it is perfect: and you will teach me to cook the beautiful muffins. I will cook the muffin for my husband."

There was a brilliancy and vigour about this slender woman, as she conjured up before her wayward eyes this picture of domestic bliss, which drew from Lady Lappin a soft sigh of admiration. At whatever cost Brigida would aid her beloved friend on this noble path. She drew her again into her arms, and imprinted a solemn kiss upon her forehead.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

“ My salad days

When I was green in judgment, cold in blood.

PHILIP LAMOND blamed himself but little for lingering in Venice. He felt himself so strong, that he dared to make this last concession to his weakness. Had he been placed in the same circumstances a year before, he had perhaps shouted defiance—and fled : but now he was calm and prudent ; he trusted himself and the stability of his purpose. He did not deceive nor try to deceive himself. He knew that he lingered from day to day because she was there, for joy of the knowledge that one city held them both. Silent and motionless he stood in the dusk by the Palazzo Belrotoli, and laid his hand upon that ancient wall, which had survived a thousand romances. There was comfort in the rough stone, though, as he caressed it, the

eyes which he pressed against the caressing hand were full of tears. He was moved to amazement by his own calm. Could it be he who was putting aside so bravely and quietly all hope of love? Could it be he, who after a few hours was going away like any other careless tourist, regretful for the beauty of Venice? It was he, and yet instead of cursing his fate he was making ready for the journey.

Beyond the intention of speedy departure Philip had been slowly forming the purpose of a lifelong devotion to his art. Nothing could change it now. It was grounded firm on a strong sense of duty; he could justify it with a thousand arguments. He knew now that with time and pains he could make something good. Therefore he held it his duty to grudge no time and to spare no pains. Nor was this statement of his duty a mere phrase to him; it was rather a divine rule of life, which he hailed with no cries of lip-service, to which he clung with all the passionate enthusiasm of his nature. He was strong enough to live his whole life through without love; but he would not grow old before he had put all his strength and patience into the effort to do some good thing for the world. He had been learning fast of late, and knew that to



be a great artist is no easy matter. He could find no school which satisfied him. It was clear to him that only through many experiments failures and shortcomings could he find and master the methods proper to himself. It was likely that he would try many subjects before he found which were best suited to his powers. Meanwhile he knew that he would put aside all expectation of easy popularity and early gain. And was not this to put aside love? There was but one woman in the world whom he could love. If this woman came to him penniless, how could he bear to see her almost in want during his years of study, his long apprenticeship? And on the other hand could he bear that she should take her money from her father? It was intolerable that for his sake she should decline one hair's-breadth from her high idea of right. Not the faintest stain of meanness should mar her image in his mind. She was not for him; and that was all. Luckily she had received no hurt from him. He had seen her in her freedom, growing in strength and beauty. Her love for him was over and gone. That was the one certain fact—the important thing, which he must not lose sight of for a moment. Were it not so, all would be different. Were it not so, he would

carry her away in spite of all the prudence in the world; he would slave for her, live on a crust that she might fare the better, and hold himself most happy. But it was certain that her fancy for him had passed as the breath of flowers. He had awakened her in her enchanted garden. He was the first on whom her dreamy eyes had opened. That was all; and it was better so. He told himself that it was well that she had but learned the alphabet of love. He foresaw that all would go smoothly with her now. As a child she had been sacrificed to her father's book: it was well that as a woman she should not be sacrificed to a husband's art studies. And Cheepry was a good fellow, and would be vastly improved by marriage. And Hugo Deane would keep the money, as he naturally wished to do. For the sake of everybody but one thing was necessary; and that one thing was that Philip should go away. He was an embarrassing presence, and he knew it. And yet he lingered a little making this last concession to his weakness.

So a little time had passed away, when one morning Philip Lamond awoke and said to himself that this was his last day in Venice. He made up his mind to spend that day alone, and he frankly told Stephen his intention. The day was to be

without event, given to dreams. To-morrow he would set forth towards a new life; but these few slow hours between dawn and dusk should bear the burden of his sorrow and be not wholly sad. So he took his sketch-book, and was minded to lie all day out on the still lagoons. He did not expect to do much work.

Now, though the day was still young, there were other folk stirring, and Philip had but just left the house when he was aware of a jubilant voice hailing him, and the voice was that of Mr Bonamy Playdell. Bonamy could hardly get his young friend's name out for very glee, and his words went gurgling into laughter. He was in possession of the most delightful secret which he had ever known. He seemed to hug it to his ample chest, and to roll it between his plump hands. "Ha, ha, early birds, early birds!" cried he advancing buoyantly to Philip. "Up betimes in the pleasant morning, eh?" And he stood to sniff the breeze.

Lamond was much surprised by this idyllic mood and early rising. "I thought you had gone away," he said, and he tried to speak heartily, while he was busy wondering if this gay rover were bent on being his comrade for the day.

But Mr Playdell had far different intentions. "Going to sketch," he said catching sight of the book; "you rise to your work: don't overdo it: all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy; and you are dull, you boys; you can't play; you are fit for nothing but work." And the good gentleman skipped in his holiday humour, and laughed with childlike glee. "Ha, ha! you can't amuse yourselves; you can't be jolly; you have no feeling; no deep true tender feeling; no constancy—you boys!"

Philip was surprised by this unprovoked attack and began to look at Bonamy with some doubts of his complete sanity. But that gentleman suddenly wrung him by the hand, and with a voice broken by emotion, as when a feeble tenor indulges tremulously in recitative, began to murmur: "We come back; we the others; we who felt and feel; we come back; one always comes back to one's first love."

Philip felt a quick spasm of interest, and a vast desire to laugh. "What is it?" he asked.

"I am going to be married," cried Mr Playdell victoriously.

Then Philip did laugh and shook him warmly by the hand. "I can guess who the lady is," he said.

"*On revient toujours*," murmured Bonamy kissing the rosy tips of his fingers.

"I congratulate you with all my heart," said Philip shaking his hand once more.

"Ah you boys, you boys! you don't know what love is. It is a passionless, an unromantic age. You, and Freddie Chee pyre, and all. He said yesterday——"

"Who said?"

"Chee pyre."

"Is he in Venice?"

"Yes, he came yesterday: haven't you seen him? Oh, I daresay not; perhaps I ought not to have told you; he is keeping very close lest our Contessina should discover him; don't say I told you; I can't stay with you; I have a more agreeable companion, ha, ha! good-bye."

Thus Philip learned that young Lord Chee pyre was again in Venice. The fact was rather bitter to him, though he told himself that it was as it should be. At least it was well that he had made up his mind to go on the morrow.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Thou common friend that's without faith or love,  
For such is a friend now."

PHILIP LAMOND found no rest on the lagoon. The image of the triumphant Bonamy haunted him like a buoyant body, which thrust down again and again into the deep rises ever irrepressible and cheerful to the surface. The sound of the joyous voice announcing that one always returns to one's first love hummed all day in the young painter's ear. In vain that he opened his sketch-book, that he looked studiously for effects. Instead of a mood of gentle melancholy he attained to nothing but restlessness and bitter humour. More than once he surprised the friendly Marco by a sudden burst of laughter as he remembered Mr Playdell's denunciation of a passionless and unromantic generation. "We who felt and feel," he repeated

under his breath, and laughed though he was not happy.

The athletic young Marco, who was glad to spend the long day dozing in sunshine or in moments of energy crooning an ancient song, lazily noted one more proof of the madness of Englishmen. Slowly the lagging hours passed away, and the last day of the old life was almost done. It seemed to Philip that on the morrow he would pass alive the gates of death; but he purposed steadfastly to lead a worthy life beyond. "Let us go back," he said at last, and the gondolier uncoiled himself and went in leisurely manner to work. Perhaps he felt the influence of the quiet time. As he moved his boat near to the city, Philip stopped him, that he might see for the last time beyond Venice the tender beauty of the western sky. The air was motionless and the old stained and painted houses of the Giudecca were reflected under the clear water in pure pale yellow and pink. Even then the exquisite colour moved the young painter to a new regret. The life, which he would leave to-morrow, was full of light splendour and harmony, an atmosphere in which sorrow itself was beautiful. The new life which lay before him seemed rugged and harsh in the gloom. "Go on," he said as he sat

up in his place. He would allow himself no more weakness. The difficulties which lay before him were, as he knew well, the one great blessing which remained to him. It was for him to do his work well. Had it been possible that so working he might have known the joys of life and love the crown of joys, he would have held them dear, as few men hold them, and given thanks therefor.

Seeing that these good things were not for him, he was grateful that the chief good yet remained—power to do the work which pleased him best. He was strong; he knew his strength and he trusted it. These were no small matters. He would leave the pleasures of sentiment to the generation who could feel. So up sprang the buoyant image of Mr Bonamy Playdell, and the hard-hearted youth fell a-laughing once more.

It was twilight when Philip stepped ashore at the Piazzetta. He named the hour at which Marco was to come for him and his luggage in the morning, bade him good night, and walked quickly towards the Campanile. But he had barely reached it when he stopped abruptly and felt his heart stop also. Close to him and coming towards him was Freddie Chee pyre. Philip was inclined to



curse his luck. A few hours later he would be gone; it seemed singularly unfortunate that he could not go without meeting his friend and happy rival. His first impulse was to plunge into the Arcade on his left, but in a moment he knew that it was too late—that he was seen. It was only when he advanced with outstretched hand that it struck him suddenly that his friend was at least equally willing to avoid a meeting. It was evident even in the uncertain light that the little lord was flushed, and his voice had not its wonted ring of good-humour.

“How are you?”

“How are you?”

After this interchange of civilities there was an awkward pause; and then Philip bethought him of asking after the other's health.

“Oh, I am all right,” said Cheepyre gloomily; and then added as if in obedience to a more gracious after-thought, “thanks to your nursing I daresay.”

“Oh, not at all;” and Philip laughed nervously; “you stay here some time of course?” The question sounded foolish to him as he asked it, but he was surprised by a decided negative. “No?” he asked again.

"Well, it ain't so very strange," said Freddie in the tone of a spoiled child; "I daresay you can guess why not."

"I? I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, of course if you like to go on humbugging about the matter, it's nothing to me. Of course I know I owe you a lot Philip, but hang me if I can make out why you let me in for this."

"What have I let you in for? What's the matter?" asked Philip sharply. He was thinking that this spoiled child was unworthy of his luck.

"You ought to have told me last year when I spoke to you about it."

"About what?"

"I don't see what good it did you making me make a fool of myself like this."

This somewhat involved and enigmatical sentence gave no new light to his friend, who stood waiting for further information. "You needn't have kept it dark," said Freddie after a pause; "I really do think that, when I told you what I meant to do, you might have told me that Cynthia was engaged to you."

"Who told you that?" cried Philip hoarsely and making a kind of clutch at Cheepry's coat.

"It's not true," he went on as he held him tight, "it's not true. She is free—perfectly free."

"Do you mean that you want to get out of it?" He jerked away his coat from the other's grasp and looked up at him with anger in his eyes. "If you are trying to shuffle out of this I can only say——"

"Stop," said Philip who was calm again. "Wait half a minute. It is true that a year ago I asked Miss Deane to be my wife."

"And then you thought better of it, and thought you'd make use of me to take her off your hands."

"No." The word was so emphatic that the eloquence of Lord Cheeppyre was abruptly stopped. He stared at Lamond, distrustful and warlike still, but prepared to listen. "Her father did not like it; she would not come to me without his full approval; she was right as she always is; I left her free." Here Cheeppyre was going to say something, but Philip stopped him with a gesture and went on. "When you spoke to me of her, I knew that you were going to do what her father wished; I thought that she would learn to love you; that good would come of it; it was hard to do, but I wished you luck. That's the whole thing, and I am glad I have told you. Whoever told you that

Miss Deane was bound by any promise to me was entirely mistaken."

"She told me herself."

The blood rushed to Philip's face as he heard the words. "What?" he gasped, and could say no more.

"I came here," said Chee pyre doggedly, "to ask her to marry me. I asked her to-day and she—she said no. Of course I was surprised; and I asked if there was any reason. She said yes; and I asked what his name was. And so she told me that of course she could never marry you, but of course she could never marry anybody else, or words to that effect."

"And she said that?" It was to Philip Lamond as if a miracle had been wrought before his eyes; as if the world and life had felt a sudden change. He had so surely taught himself to believe all that made hope impossible that he could scarcely imagine the truth of the words which he heard. He stood dumb with wonder and with throbbing pulses. After a time he said, "I have been a fool. Freddie, I have done you a great wrong, but I did not mean to. Can you forgive me?"

"Oh yes," said Lord Chee pyre, and he gave him his hand. "It seems to me that you did a devilish

fine thing, or tried to do it. I can't say I am very grateful, but—curse you Philip! I do wish you joy with all my heart.” Philip clutched his hand, but the little lord pulled it away that he might get at his handkerchief. “A pretty good fool I am making of myself,” he said in a broken voice; “can I do anything for you in London? It's deuced bad taste.” Here he made a meritorious attempt to laugh. Philip had nothing to say. He asserted his folly many times. He got hold of Cheepry's hand again and held it. He began to heap further terms of abuse on himself; but his friend would not listen. “Oh don't bother about me,” he said, “it don't matter; I am young you know; and good-bye and good luck to you old man; I'm going to get some din—dinner.”

## CHAPTER XXV.

"She was false as water."

PHILIP left alone stood as one dazed by sudden catastrophe. The dusk was growing to darkness about him and the yellow lights were starting through the gloom. He stood and watched them, dumbly and breathlessly awaiting the flood of emotions. He could not yet be glad, but with a numb pain expected the first faint glow of a triumphant dawn. After a time thoughts of art and love, of the toil and the glory of life, came and went in the darkness. His many theories hung loose upon him as torn rags on a scarecrow. Regret and hope were loud, but above all amazement. Slowly one thought took absolute possession of him. Then, try as he might, he could not be calm. Fragments of passionate speech broke from his lips. "She loves me," he whispered, "she

loves me. It is I whom she loves—I." It seemed that he could scarcely believe in his identity, that it was of him and not of some dead self that this great thing was true. "She loves me." Once and once only, he thought, in the world had the tree of Love put forth its supreme flower; and that flower was for him. No fancy was too fantastic for his faith in that hour. And he would greatly dare and win this priceless thing. He must win this woman to be his wife, though he should spend his life in drudgery—in painting for daily bread and cheap popularity. There was no doubt about this. He laughed at the importance of his art. What was the best his hand could do beside this divine work? She must be happy at all cost; and the cost was nothing. His own happiness he would have sacrificed to his canvas, but not the happiness of her who loved him. She loved him, and her love was above price. His head was throbbing. His beating heart was as the gallop of a horse in his ears. The feelings, which he had bound down with all the strength of his manhood, the feelings which he had stifled in the depths, rose on him and hurled him from his foothold. Suddenly he seemed to wake out of a trance to find himself hurrying towards the Palazzo Belrotoli with cold hand

clenched and lips muttering like a madman's. He stopped short, frightened by his own frenzy. No good could come of this. Was he mad that he did not pause to think, to decide what to do? Was he a man, and should he yield himself like a slave to his own passion? What if he were rushing to disappointment? What more likely than that this boy was mistaken? Lord Cheepryre was not very wise at the best, and now he had been moved to an unusual degree; how easily he might have confused past with present, have misunderstood a girl's few words. Then he, Philip Lamond, who had held himself so strong, waking in horror to find that in delirium he had staked life itself upon a chance, would be drawn away by the ebb and flung helpless to death. There was time now. He had remembered himself in time. He could yet make him ready for any fate. So as he walked he forced himself to think. He would not be sure of her love. Even if she still cared for him, were it not better for her that he should go? He only thought of her good; he would not think of himself. Were it not better for her? He had seen with his own eyes that she could live without him; that she had grown in strength and beauty though he had gone from her.



It was a truism, a thing which all men know, that a young girl's fancy cannot live on memory however true-hearted she may be. If she were to see him no more, his image would soon grow dim, and in time she would see somebody else, and the old story would be told once again. Or if Freddie were but constant for a little while she would learn to care for him, and it would be a great deal better without doubt. Then Philip told himself again that he must think of her and of her only ; that, let him toil for money as he might, her life with him must be hard ; that her youth had been sacrificed to her father, and that the fulness of her life should not be sacrificed to her husband. He had made up his mind to be rational, and such arguments pressed upon him with terrible force. His steps had become slower and slower as he was more and more master of his passion ; but yet after much walking backward and forward he stood silent in the shadow by the little side-gate of the Palazzo Belrotoli. There he stood, until after long deliberation with himself he made up his mind. He determined to leave Venice, but before he went to tell everything to Stephen Aylward and to trust to his observation. Stephen should see her often, and should listen to Andrew Fernlyn's remarks about

her. So he Philip toiling somewhere, anywhere far away, would hear of her, and that should be enough for him—all the joy of his life. He had only to be strong, as became a man. If he heard of her growing ever in grace and beauty, as day by day she looked with new knowledge and new wonder out over the beautiful world, until in the press of things, in the richness of interests, the memory of her child's romance was as of something read in an old book of others' loves, as a sweet fragrance recalling in some idle moment the garden where the children played; if in a word she were happy and he were sure of her happiness—then he would ask no more. If on the other hand—but he would not let his imagination cheat him with false pictures. He would not believe it possible that he was necessary to her happiness. Stephen's letters would tell of her wellbeing, and they should be his consolation. He had decided what to do. He knew that he was wise, for all the arguments were on one side. Strong in his purpose he lifted up his face and looked his last on the old palace wall.

• This purpose of Philip Lamond formed after anxious thought, made steadfast in spite of pain, was straightway annihilated by a chance meeting and the impetuosity of a lazy woman. As he stood

curse his luck. A few hours later he would be gone; it seemed singularly unfortunate that he could not go without meeting his friend and happy rival. His first impulse was to plunge into the Arcade on his left, but in a moment he knew that it was too late—that he was seen. It was only when he advanced with outstretched hand that it struck him suddenly that his friend was at least equally willing to avoid a meeting. It was evident even in the uncertain light that the little lord was flushed, and his voice had not its wonted ring of good-humour.

“How are you?”

“How are you?”

After this interchange of civilities there was an awkward pause; and then Philip bethought him of asking after the other's health.

“Oh, I am all right,” said Cheepyre gloomily; and then added as if in obedience to a more gracious after-thought, “thanks to your nursing I daresay.”

“Oh, not at all;” and Philip laughed nervously; “you stay here some time of course?” The question sounded foolish to him as he asked it, but he was surprised by a decided negative. “No?” he asked again.

"Well, it ain't so very strange," said Freddie in the tone of a spoiled child; "I daresay you can guess why not."

"I? I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, of course if you like to go on humbugging about the matter, it's nothing to me. Of course I know I owe you a lot Philip, but hang me if I can make out why you let me in for this."

"What have I let you in for? What's the matter?" asked Philip sharply. He was thinking that this spoiled child was unworthy of his luck.

"You ought to have told me last year when I spoke to you about it."

"About what?"

"I don't see what good it did you making me make a fool of myself like this."

This somewhat involved and enigmatical sentence gave no new light to his friend, who stood waiting for further information. "You needn't have kept it dark," said Freddie after a pause; "I really do think that, when I told you what I meant to do, you might have told me that Cynthia was engaged to you."

"Who told you that?" cried Philip hoarsely and making a kind of clutch at Cheepry's coat.

"It's not true," he went on as he held him tight, "it's not true. She is free—perfectly free."

"Do you mean that you want to get out of it?" He jerked away his coat from the other's grasp and looked up at him with anger in his eyes. "If you are trying to shuffle out of this I can only say——"

"Stop," said Philip who was calm again. "Wait half a minute. It is true that a year ago I asked Miss Deane to be my wife."

"And then you thought better of it, and thought you'd make use of me to take her off your hands."

"No." The word was so emphatic that the eloquence of Lord Chee pyre was abruptly stopped. He stared at Lamond, distrustful and warlike still, but prepared to listen. "Her father did not like it; she would not come to me without his full approval; she was right as she always is; I left her free." Here Chee pyre was going to say something, but Philip stopped him with a gesture and went on. "When you spoke to me of her, I knew that you were going to do what her father wished; I thought that she would learn to love you; that good would come of it; it was hard to do, but I wished you luck. That's the whole thing, and I am glad I have told you. Whoever told you that

Miss Deane was bound by any promise to me was entirely mistaken."

"She told me herself."

The blood rushed to Philip's face as he heard the words. "What?" he gasped, and could say no more.

"I came here," said Chee pyre doggedly, "to ask her to marry me. I asked her to-day and she—she said no. Of course I was surprised; and I asked if there was any reason. She said yes; and I asked what his name was. And so she told me that of course she could never marry you, but of course she could never marry anybody else, or words to that effect."

"And she said that?" It was to Philip Lamond as if a miracle had been wrought before his eyes; as if the world and life had felt a sudden change. He had so surely taught himself to believe all that made hope impossible that he could scarcely imagine the truth of the words which he heard. He stood dumb with wonder and with throbbing pulses. After a time he said, "I have been a fool. Freddie, I have done you a great wrong, but I did not mean to. Can you forgive me?"

"Oh yes," said Lord Chee pyre, and he gave him his hand. "It seems to me that you did a devilish

self on having his wits about him ; he caught at a familiar thought ; and even at that moment he felt a gentle pleasure in the excellence of his Italian pronunciation. "There is pardon for those who love too much," he murmured scarcely above his breath.

"Too much !" she cried out in anguish ; "but I have never loved—never, never, never." She started up, and Hugo jumped quickly backward.

For the first time the woman was clearly aware of the presence of men, and knew that they were looking at her. As she stood and stared at them she began to amplify her theme, to execute variations on her anguish. "I have never known love," she cried : "I never could love. All is still here," and she laid her hand upon her heart ; "still and cold as the tomb."

Mr Deane fixed his eyes inquiringly on Philip ; the young man turned aside with a sigh of relief. As he turned, he heard voices and steps on the stone stairs. He crossed the room and drew aside the curtain, as the door after some fumbling was pulled noisily open. Then Lady Lappin came sailing in with extended arms and motherly babbling of pity.

The Belrotoli launched herself towards her friend and was lost in her embrace. Philip half hidden

## CHAPTER XXV.

"She was false as water."

PHILIP left alone stood as one dazed by sudden catastrophe. The dusk was growing to darkness about him and the yellow lights were starting through the gloom. He stood and watched them, dumbly and breathlessly awaiting the flood of emotions. He could not yet be glad, but with a numb pain expected the first faint glow of a triumphant dawn. After a time thoughts of art and love, of the toil and the glory of life, came and went in the darkness. His many theories hung loose upon him as torn rags on a scarecrow. Regret and hope were loud, but above all amazement. Slowly one thought took absolute possession of him. Then, try as he might, he could not be calm. Fragments of passionate speech broke from his lips. "She loves me," he whispered, "she



## CHAPTER XXVI.

“ Did my heart love till now ! ”

THE apartments of Lady Lappin were many and splendid; but beyond them all was a smaller room, which seemed to be there by chance, to have been dropped in to fill a corner. It had but two windows and each looked a different way. The sun was in it all day long, and it was the favourite haunt of Cynthia Deane. There she sat in the sleepy afternoon and looked away to the light upon the waters. And as she looked, her fancy passed beyond her sight and she thought of her beloved island on the lagoon. With a smile a little sad she pictured old Rosa and her small rough Swiss cows. She wished that she might help to milk them that evening, but her hands lay idle on her open book and the tears rose to her eyes. There were many sad things even in her little world.

clenched and lips muttering like a madman's. He stopped short, frightened by his own frenzy. No good could come of this. Was he mad that he did not pause to think, to decide what to do? Was he a man, and should he yield himself like a slave to his own passion? What if he were rushing to disappointment? What more likely than that this boy was mistaken? Lord Cheeppyre was not very wise at the best, and now he had been moved to an unusual degree; how easily he might have confused past with present, have misunderstood a girl's few words. Then he, Philip Lamond, who had held himself so strong, waking in horror to find that in delirium he had staked life itself upon a chance, would be drawn away by the ebb and flung helpless to death. There was time now. He had remembered himself in time. He could yet make him ready for any fate. So as he walked he forced himself to think. He would not be sure of her love. Even if she still cared for him, were it not better for her that he should go? He only thought of her good; he would not think of himself. Were it not better for her? He had seen with his own eyes that she could live without him; that she had grown in strength and beauty though he had gone from her.

the Lappin household was more than appreciated; it was accepted with awe by Sir Rupert, with well-ordered enthusiasm by his wife. He conferred a favour on them by establishing his family under their roof, and he found his expenses very light. Moreover the place and the life were clearly made for his convenience and improvement. His thoughts seemed to grow rich and to be suffused with colour in that atmosphere of warmth ease and good living. They bloomed like hothouse plants; and even his style seemed to his critical eye less meagre and frigid. He felt himself more robust; he rubbed his delicate hands gently together; he more than once gave vent to a sound which but for a protesting refinement might have been described as a chuckle. Now to him placed among good things, material comforts and constant respect, had come a crowning gift. The editor of the new and important periodical, the initiator of the great literary enterprise of which all the world were talking, which was discussed, attacked, referred to, puffed in a thousand newspapers, had of his own free will written to beg an article on Venetian history from Mr Hugo Deane. The letter had been written with consummate taste; its flattery was most delicate; it asked for a

her. So he Philip toiling somewhere, anywhere far away, would hear of her, and that should be enough for him—all the joy of his life. He had only to be strong, as became a man. If he heard of her growing ever in grace and beauty, as day by day she looked with new knowledge and new wonder out over the beautiful world, until in the press of things, in the richness of interests, the memory of her child's romance was as of something read in an old book of others' loves, as a sweet fragrance recalling in some idle moment the garden where the children played; if in a word she were happy and he were sure of her happiness—then he would ask no more. If on the other hand—but he would not let his imagination cheat him with false pictures. He would not believe it possible that he was necessary to her happiness. Stephen's letters would tell of her wellbeing, and they should be his consolation. He had decided what to do. He knew that he was wise, for all the arguments were on one side. Strong in his purpose he lifted up his face and looked his last on the old palace wall.

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moment had left Mr Deane to the gratitude of the Countess and the congratulations of her ample Brigida. Indeed Hugo was half inclined to send for the young man, and would probably have done so, had not the mere thought of such an uninvited overture offended his fastidious taste. He was in the mood to be princely; but princes should of all men be most delicate; they should await the suitor. So Mr Deane waited hoping to be sued, wishing to do an act of generosity, which would not only be graceful but would also take a self-willed daughter off his hands.

Cynthia ignorant of her father's fancy, and displeased with herself in that she could not more keenly enjoy his triumph, sat alone and stared at the flower-shaped chimneys, which flower-like seemed to open to the warm air. The soft dark eyes under the drooping lids were wet with tears, and the red lips, which were quick to show emotion as a child's, quivered and pouted. That Venetian afternoon was very rich in quiet splendour; but the young English girl fancied that it was all apart from her, that she would ever look at it longingly as the princess in the brazen tower. Careless and idly sitting she heard the door open—and there was Philip. She looked at him with open eyes and

parted lips, while the colour came flooding the dark cheek with beauty. She rose with a little sob, and went to him and looked into his face. As he held her once more in his arms, the remnants of his doubts and fine-spun arguments melted like gossamer in the sun. He needed no assurance of her love. His life was not more a fact beyond dispute than that she loved him for life as he loved her. To set Stephen on to observe seemed the veriest absurdity. Argument and protestation were mere waste of breath. He knew that such love of such a woman could in no way be a hindrance—could not but be a charm to keep the conscience strong, the aim high, the work good. He felt that in any crisis of life she must of necessity choose the highest path—that with her he could not judge wrong. Holding her in his arms he was filled with shame of his folly; for had he not deliberately decided that it was best for them to live apart? Life would have been a poor thing for both; and this was a truth which a child might read—a child with eyes like hers. So in that happy hour Philip Lamond purposed to live nobly and to do noble work; and Cynthia prayed that she might be a real help to him. When the evening sun came slanting in and filling the little room with brief splendour,

Philip and Cynthia sat hand in hand and talked together of the future. He had made full confession pouring forth speech with all his old boyish impetuosity, and was at last charmed to stillness in the peace of her presence. Yet she had been shocked, when he told her of his mad vision of supporting his wife by drudgery, of making the pot boil with acres of canvas.

"You could never be so wicked," she said. "Of course you will always do the best work. You will be like the padre."

As Philip looked down into her sweet trustful eyes he was moved to a strange awe by the girl's faith in her father. He wondered if she had ever doubted; if she ever would doubt. He suspected that he would never know if she doubted or not; he determined that he would never try to know, that he would respect her reticence in this matter; he loved her the better for her trust and loyalty.

"You will do something great, Philip," she said with a new light in her eyes.

"I will try to do something good," he answered; and the words as he spoke them seemed sacred as prayer and vow.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

“And, when I ope my lips, let no dog bark !”

“DON’T disturb the young things,” cried Bonamy Playdell hovering about Lady Lappin’s tea-table ; and as he spoke he glanced across the hissing urn at his Lily with a look which was almost a wink. In the twilight and under the influence of unexpected or long expected joy the little lines in Miss Lindley’s cheek were almost invisible. She was even less eager than of yore for her good hostess’s tea and muffins. She was content.

In answer to Mr Playdell Lady Lappin pursed her plump lips and nodded in the direction of Mr Hugo Deane, as who would say, “Nor must he be disturbed. Who knows of what importance his thoughts may be ?” And indeed Hugo was almost lost in thought, though the subject was familiar and domestic. He was thinking of his daughter. All



her life she had diverted from graver subjects a portion of her father's thoughts, which had always seemed to him absurdly out of proportion to her importance. She had intruded on many historical discussions, and he had early acquired a habit of admitting her to his mind. In his idle moments he had been often absorbed by her, and then been vexed with her, and with himself for thinking of her. But this evening he felt strong and comfortable as he had not felt for years; and he intended to think the matter through and through for the last time. He sat in a deep easy-chair of an agreeable colour, crossed one elegant leg over the other, and while the slim fingers of the right hand played with the antique ring on the left, he considered his daughter's prospects as they affected her—and himself. He had never thought of his child with so much ease and comfort. He was sure that she was happy, and he foresaw that she would go away. To the rational parent both facts were satisfactory. It was good that she should go away. He had seen from the first that she was out of place in the Palazzo Belrotoli. All the rest of the Deane family—himself, Fabian, Cecco, and Vittoria the nurse—were part of that great favour, which he Hugo was conferring on Sir Rupert Lappin and his

excellent lady. But he had never been able to bring Cynthia into the same category. He had felt that he owed an apology for his daughter, and he hated to owe anything, and he hated to make apologies. Of the keenest sight in such matters he had soon noticed that Lady Lappin was worried by the girl's presence. All Clapham Common rose in the breast of the British wife against the idea of a girl trotting about a wicked foreign town by herself, or sitting in the garden of an old painter who taught pupils. On the other hand, all the artist within her rebelled against the notion of the leisure, which was due to art, absorbed by the common cares of the chaperon. What were the use of heroic renunciation of society if she were to be bound in the very palace of art by the most paltry whip-cords of conventionality? So it was a fact that Lady Lappin was disturbed by the presence of Cynthia, whom moreover she thought lamentably deficient in enthusiasm; and Hugo Deane well aware of his hostess's disturbance told himself that it was well that his daughter should go. It was best for others; and he told himself that a father's feelings must not be allowed to stand in the way. He did not say to himself that her absence would be a relief to him; that he should be more at ease

without an element, which had always disquieted him and stung him to unanswerable but tiresome arguments with his conscience. He did not say to himself that an instinctive sense of the uncompromising truthfulness of Cynthia had for years past stirred in him again and again a peculiar terror, lest some day she should criticise him and turn her inquiring eyes wide-open upon his life's work. He decided on other grounds that it was well that she should see him less frequently. It was well that she should go away; and very well that she should be happy. He thought of her happiness with an unusual glow. He was really very glad that she should be happy: he could think of her mother, his first love, the woman who had loved him so well in his youth, with a comfort which he had not known for years. Had he not made their child happy by giving her to Philip? He clung to that thought to the exclusion of others; and he almost ignored the bitter drop which intruded itself into the sweet waters of self-satisfaction. But the drop was there; the child, who was going from him, still caused him a slight vexation. He could not help being irritated by the certainty that she would be completely happy apart from him; that his influence over her was much less than it should be; that her present

joy was so independent of him. He would not have her always with him ; he would not have her unhappy away from him ; and yet as he foresaw her happy life—happy though removed from the sphere of his influence—he was a little vexed by the picture. Moreover he had an uneasy suspicion that this picture would recur to him too often in the future and never without this element of vexation. He told himself that it was he who had made her happy by coming to an arrangement with Philip ; but here again some unwelcome thoughts intruded. He had proposed to give up half the income of his daughter's little fortune, and himself to use the other half while he lived. "All will be hers at my death," he had said to Philip with a sense of princely generosity : "what I can save or make, if I have the luck to be popular (but who dare count on popularity, even if he deserve it ?), I shall leave to my boy ; and I am sure that you and Cynthia will not let him starve." Here Philip, who had been cold and formal during the interview, had grown suddenly warm and pledged himself with unnecessary violence. And Hugo Deane thinking the matter over in the big easy-chair told himself that he had been generous. It is true that he only surrendered half of the income, to the whole of

which his daughter was legally entitled, but he had always despised the law. He felt that with justice he might have enjoyed it all; that, had she married Cheepyre, he would have enjoyed it all; that for his child's sake he had contented himself with half. So in spite of some whispering doubts he was pleased with himself and his paternal generosity. He was well placed, as he deserved to be; and looking round upon the people, of whose presence he had been at least half unconscious, he met the reverential look of Lady Lappin, and graciously and with a smile at his own weakness accepted a cup of tea. As he received it he asked with proper interest after the health of the Belrotoli.

"Yes, how is our poor Contessina?" asked Bonamy wheeling round at the name.

"She is as well as one can hope," said Lady Lappin with a soft sigh; "and so good, so wonderfully good. She is determined to do the right thing. It is beautiful, childlike, Greek. She implored me with tears in eyes to give her maid the pattern of a real old-fashioned English widow's cap. She will have nothing else: and crape: she has begged me to write for an immense amount of crape."

"It will be very striking," said Bonamy with a

comical glance at his betrothed; "why does she not join us this evening?"

"Fie," said his hostess rebuking his levity, "she has not left her bed. She will see nobody at present."

"Of course you have heard," said Mr Playdell dropping his voice but appealing to the general public, "that the rascal of a valet swears that the Count fell off the platform on purpose to avoid paying his wages?"

Lady Lappin's mouth was round with astonishment and she paused with the teapot in air. Mr Deane glanced sideways at the gossip with a good-humoured contempt, which struck an unusual spark from the mild eyes of Miss Lindley. She ruffled herself like a hen defending her chicks, while her unconscious Bonamy continued.

"For my part," said he, "I think that there were other reasons, or another reason—don't be afraid my dear Lily, I will say nothing about her. I am a model of discretion; but a little bird has told me——" Here he paused, and Sir Rupert drew nearer with an air of apologetic but flattering curiosity. But Lady Lappin was loyal to her bereaved friend.

"No, no," she said with dignity, as she rapped

her saucer with the spoon, "it was the merest accident. The poor Count stepped backwards to avoid a clumsy porter and fell in front of the train. Nothing can be more natural. I will hear no more about it." She looked at Bonamy with her stateliest air, and the cheery little gentleman looked round on the rest of the party.

"Let us take it like that," he said with a chuckle ; "may I ask for a second lump of sugar in my tea?"

Lady Lappin was in a state of great dignity and general benevolence. She was dedicating herself to the consolation of a countess, to the congratulation of an affianced bride, first and foremost to the admiration of a great man. She was glad to think that to her Hugo Deane had always been a hero. She had believed in him when the world, aye even the literary world, had been blind to his merit. Now she had her reward. Having administered her little rebuke to the loquacious Bonamy, and finding her heart inconveniently full she after a slight pause launched a little speech over the tea-cups. The others turned towards her ; and Andrew Fernlyn and Stephen Aylward, who had been talking together in one of the windows, came a little nearer to listen. "I cannot let this pleasant hour

pass," said the lady gravely, "without saying how deeply my husband and myself, for I know I speak for both, appreciate the honour of having with us, as one of us if I may say so, as one of the family, the honoured of the world of letters, Mr Hugo Deane. Let us all join in congratulating him on the engagement of his daughter, but chiefly on the high honour which he has received. For myself I can only say that I have my reward ; that a life devoted, perhaps not wholly in vain, to the cause of art finds its chief glory in the glory of this distinguished scholar and man of letters." She ceased amid a murmur of applause, and Mr Fernlyn laughed cheerily and cried "Bravo!"

During the little oration, which the artistic lady had delivered from her chair, Hugo Deane had remained motionless, except for the wrinkling of his eyebrows, a drawing down of the corner of his mouth, and one humorous but pathetic glance directed at his nephew Stephen. But when the buzz of appreciation which followed the speech had subsided, Hugo rose with careless ease and an air of great good-humour, half conciliatory half contemptuous, slightly hesitating and choosing his words. Of course it was an absurd thing to make



a speech at a tea-party ; but luckily he could afford to do an absurd thing with a proper recognition of its absurdity. Yet even as he began to speak, a thought which had flitted through his mind before struck him with new force. While his lips were smiling and the well-chosen words fell easily from them ; he was even then certain that after this important article he would be the same man as before—that this contribution to monthly literature would nearly exhaust all that was novel and interesting in the material collected for his great work—that in the future he would be known to a few as the man who had written a clever paper and was supposed to be at work on something bigger. But for all that he was bound to finish his little speech, being now on his legs and leaning with an air of friendly confidence on the back of his easy-chair. So he stifled the intrusive thoughts and proceeded to say a few words.

“Our excellent hostess is too good—much too good. I have a horror of speech-making, as doubtless you will all believe; of making a mountain of a mole-hill; of stirring up, if I may say so, a storm in a tea-cup—and such a tea-cup: but I cannot allow such very flattering expressions to pass without

protest. I cannot for one moment admit that the favours are all on one side. Is it no privilege for me and for my little boy to be admitted into so kindly a home,—and at the same time, if I may say so, into the inner temple of Art? It is true that a man of my simple tastes might live anywhere; but I hope I am not such a Visigoth as to be insensible to the elegance of that home to which I have been so genially welcomed, and even I may say pressed. Doubtless I can come to some arrangement with my friend Sir Rupert—but no more on that head. It may be that my work will now be better appreciated; that it may even receive some recompense—for I do not claim to be above pecuniary considerations—but I am as slow to put faith in the patronage of the public as in that of princes. I have but one thing more to say. Let me thank you in my dear girl's name for your good wishes. I hope that I have done my duty to her—not without generosity. But I will not dilate upon a subject of so sentimental a nature. Let me merely end by asking you all who have listened to this unambitious rhetoric, this little tea-cup speech, to join with me in drinking to our excellent hostess's health a cup of her own unrivalled tea."

"Capital!" cried Bonamy as the orator sank smiling faintly into his chair. Miss Lindley tapped her saucer with her spoon, and gently murmured, "hear hear." The others also muttered in a complimentary manner; and everybody bowed to Lady Lappin over a tea-cup.

"Maestro," said Stephen as he followed Mr Fernlyn into the window, "is not the editor of this eclectic magazine one of your friends?"

"One of my greatest friends."

"I see that precious scheme of yours, my master."

"Trust your young eyes for seeing through mill-stones," said Andrew gravely, but his old eyes were laughing.

"It seems to me," said Stephen after a pause, during which the two friends looked silently westward—"it seems to me that there was more in my cousin Cynthia than I thought."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr Fernlyn with mock amazement.

"In fact I have been thinking about this a good deal lately; and I am half inclined to believe that I ought to have fallen madly in love with Cynthia."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see, I have taste. What I want is earnestness, vigour, passion." Upon this Messer Andrea gave himself to laughter. Afterwards he said gravely, "To have loved her would have been the making of you."

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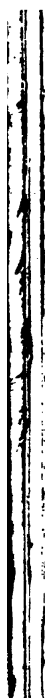
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a speech at a tea-party ; but luckily he could afford to do an absurd thing with a proper recognition of its absurdity. Yet even as he began to speak, a thought which had flitted through his mind before struck him with new force. While his lips were smiling and the well-chosen words fell easily from them ; he was even then certain that after this important article he would be the same man as before—that this contribution to monthly literature would nearly exhaust all that was novel and interesting in the material collected for his great work—that in the future he would be known to a few as the man who had written a clever paper and was supposed to be at work on something bigger. But for all that he was bound to finish his little speech, being now on his legs and leaning with an air of friendly confidence on the back of his easy-chair. So he stifled the intrusive thoughts and proceeded to say a few words.

“Our excellent hostess is too good—much too good. I have a horror of speech-making, as doubtless you will all believe; of making a mountain of a mole-hill; of stirring up, if I may say so, a storm in a tea-cup—and such a tea-cup: but I cannot allow such very flattering expressions to pass without

protest. I cannot for one moment admit that the favours are all on one side. Is it no privilege for me and for my little boy to be admitted into so kindly a home,—and at the same time, if I may say so, into the inner temple of Art? It is true that a man of my simple tastes might live anywhere; but I hope I am not such a Visigoth as to be insensible to the elegance of that home to which I have been so genially welcomed, and even I may say pressed. Doubtless I can come to some arrangement with my friend Sir Rupert—but no more on that head. It may be that my work will now be better appreciated; that it may even receive some recompense—for I do not claim to be above pecuniary considerations—but I am as slow to put faith in the patronage of the public as in that of princes. I have but one thing more to say. Let me thank you in my dear girl's name for your good wishes. I hope that I have done my duty to her—not without generosity. But I will not dilate upon a subject of so sentimental a nature. Let me merely end by asking you all who have listened to this unambitious rhetoric, this little tea-cup speech, to join with me in drinking to our excellent hostess's health a cup of her own unrivalled tea."

"Capital!" cried Bonamy as the orator sank smiling faintly into his chair. Miss Lindley tapped her saucer with her spoon, and gently murmured, "hear hear." The others also muttered in a complimentary manner; and everybody bowed to Lady Lappin over a tea-cup.

"Maestro," said Stephen as he followed Mr Fernlyn into the window, "is not the editor of this eclectic magazine one of your friends?"

"One of my greatest friends."

"I see that precious scheme of yours, my master."

"Trust your young eyes for seeing through mill-stones," said Andrew gravely, but his old eyes were laughing.

"It seems to me," said Stephen after a pause, during which the two friends looked silently westward—"it seems to me that there was more in my cousin Cynthia than I thought."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr Fernlyn with mock amazement.

"In fact I have been thinking about this a good deal lately; and I am half inclined to believe that I ought to have fallen madly in love with Cynthia."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see, I have taste. What I want is earnestness, vigour, passion." Upon this Messer Andrea gave himself to laughter. Afterwards he said gravely, "To have loved her would have been the making of you."

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